AN

ESSAY

CONCERNING

Liberty, Grace,

AND

Preſcience.

By *SAMUEL FANCOURT.*

At what inſtant I ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to deſtroy it: If that nation againſt whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what inſtant I ſhall ſpeak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it: If it do evil in my ſight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I ſaid, I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, ſpeak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, ſaying, Thus ſaith the Lord, Behold I frame evil againſt you, and deviſe a device againſt you: Return you now every one from his evil way; and make your ways and your doings good. And they ſaid, There is no hope, but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart, Jer. 18. 7—12.

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THE PREFACE.

SHOULD any think proper to animadvert upon this eſſay, *it is expected they ſhould conform themſelves to the rules laid down in the* preface *to my three letters, entitled,* The greatneſs of the divine love vindicated, *&c. which are now republiſhed, with an* appendix *about* original ſin.

They are deſired alſo to take particular notice of the principles *upon which I go*; 1ſt. *That ſome things* have been, *which might really* never have been, *and that the creature's* ſin *and* deſtruction *are of this number*: 2dly. *That the* grace of God *was never deſigned to* ſupercede *or render* uſeleſs *a* liberty of choice *in actions ſtrictly* ſpiritual, *but rather to* reſtore *and* encourage *ſuch a* liberty: 3dly. *That tho'* all things future *be the undoubted object of the divine* foreknowledge; *yet the* ſinful free *actions of the creature were* not al-

ways future, *what* would certainly be, *but* only poſſible *from eternity*, *what* might *or* might not *be*: 4thly. *That ſuch* prophecies *as are referable to the* actions *of* moral agents, *are either* only conditional, *according to the great* ſtandard, *laid down by God himſelf*, *with reſpect to the* prediction *of* national judgments *and* mercies, *Jer.* xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. *Or*, *if the* prediction *of ſuch* actions *be* abſolute *and peremptory*, *the* actions themſelves *are no longer* free, *what* may *or* may not *be*, *but are* abſolutely determined now, *and* muſt be: 5thly. *That the divine* mind KNOWS *no more of the* actions *and* fates *of an* unmade *world*, *than the divine* will *has* decreed *concerning them*: *And laſtly*, *That the* actual fall *of angels and men*, *with all the* ſinful *and* miſerable effects *of their* fall, *was no* object *of God's* eternal *and* decretive *will*.

ERRATA.

PAge 18. line 13. for *encitements* read *excitements*. p. 29. l. 15. for *or* r. *of*. p. 40. l. 19. for *receed* r. *recede*. p. 46. l. 37. for *And* r. *But*. p. 49. l. 4. for *thoſe* r. *theſe*. p. 90. l. 11. for *and* r. *that*. dele *at the ſame time*. p. 97. l. 6. for *deſigned* r. *deſigneth*. p. 101. l. 15. for *creature* r. *creatures*. p. 113. l. 18. for *thoughts* r. *thought*. p. 115. l. 21. for *vindicative* r. *vindictive*. p. 120. l. 7. for *in* r. *is*. p. 129. l. 13. for *worked* r. *working*. p. 131. l. 23. for *he* r. *it*.

AN

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ESSAY

CONCERNING

LIBERTY.

LETTER I.

The INTRODUCTION.

I Am, Sir, intirely of your opinion, That it is not so much *the controversies themselves*, as *the unchristian spirit* with which they are manag'd, that really hurts us. Where we judge it *necessary* for all men to *know* what is *right*, we are ready to make it a crime for them to *doubt*; even when this is necessary, that they might *really know* the right. And men no sooner differ in their *judgments* from one another, but they presently fancy it becomes them to differ in *affection* too. A friendship under opposite sentiments, especially in religious matters, is a paradox to most; as if it was impossible to love any but such, whose minds are cast exactly into the same mould with our own; but I am

perſuaded, ſhould you and I continue to differ in ſome things, it will be our mutual ambition to continue to love ſtill. And, indeed, why ſhould it be otherwiſe with thoſe, who are taught, *That the wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God?* To me there is no medium; we muſt either ſacrifice the great truths of religion for peace, or learn with a ſpirit of meekneſs and peace to defend them. Such a pacifick temper is but reaſonably expected in every *private chriſtian*, and much more in *miniſters*, whoſe education and ſtudies naturally lead them to a greater freedom of thought, and to a more charitable candour towards each other.

The *liberty* to ſpeak my mind, and a fair hearing, are all I entreat for. True, this is a privilege that *has been* abus'd, and therefore *may be* ſo. But there appears to be no help for it, but by taking away the very *liberty it ſelf*, and all *virtue of ſpeech* with it; which would yet be the real caſe, was every one compell'd to ſpeak the ſame thing. The liberty of *communicating* our thoughts is, I allow, a very *valuable privilege*; and the *more valuable* the *privilege*, the *more wiſe* and *cautelous* ſhould we be in the *uſe* of it; the rather, that no occaſion might be given to ſuperſtitious men, and lovers of darkneſs, to retrench it. But then the *more univerſal* the *grant* of ſuch liberty is, the greater (one would think) are the arguments for ſuch caution; for why ſhould any be the more indifferent, whether his ſentiments be right or wrong, trifling or important, only becauſe all men are at liberty to contradict and confute his errors, and to expoſe their danger or impertinency? That learned author was certainly in the right, when he allow'd

low'd his adverſary, *That a free and impartial enquiry after truth, wherever it is to be found, is, indeed, a noble and moſt commendable diſpoſition, which every man ought himſelf to labour after, and to the utmoſt of his power encourage in others; that it is the great foundation of all uſeful knowledge, of all true virtue, and of all ſincere religion.*

Now, if the *free and impartial uſe* of ſuch liberty be ever laudable, it muſt be ſo in defence of *liberty it ſelf*, againſt that irreligious *fatality* or *neceſſity*, to which ſome do affect to pin down all our thoughts, volitions, and actions; not duly conſidering that the ſuperior *lovelineſs* and *love* of angels and men had never been ſo lovely had they not been *once free*, and ſo capable of being *unlovely*. The heavens, indeed, declare God's glory, and the firmament ſhews his handy-work; but then it is wiſdom and power engraven upon thoughtleſs matter, upon matter that is unconſcious of its maker, uncapable of imitating him: But *moral agency* is an amazing proof of our Creator's power and ſkill! to raiſe a being out of nothing, that is able to *begin* motion, to be the real principle of its own actions, capable of acting with choice and liberty, from a ſenſe of deity, of its dependance upon God, and its obligations to him; this is a piece of workmanſhip infinitely above *mechaniſm* and *clock-work*, above any thing that moves by ſprings or weights! it is ſuch an approach towards deity it ſelf, ſuch a *living* and *lively image* of the *divine being*, that the very creature poſſeſt of it, almoſt dreads to aſſume the honour; and ſeems rather inclin'd to conceive of it ſelf as a lump of paſſive matter, or as ſome curious thinking machine only, than to allow that it has a principle ſo *divine* in its *nature*, which yet in

its *exerciſe* is ſo *wicked* and *diabolical*; did not the very *viciouſneſs* of its own actings prove, that the God of *holineſs* and *love* muſt certainly have created it with a better and a nober principle, than only with a power to *rebel* againſt its *maker*, and to *deſtroy* it ſelf. True; man cannot eaſily bear the *ſting* and the *ſhame* of being the ſubject of ſo much enmity, rebellion, and miſery, and yet allow himſelf to have a capacity to be in love with God, to be in ſubjection to his laws, and fully and for ever happy in his favour. But it becomes our declaimers againſt the dignity of the humane nature ſeriouſly to conſider with themſelves, what it is they are pleading for. "Since, though it might be ſuppos'd poſſible, "that among *neceſſary* agents a ſort of *machine* "of government might be carried on, by ſuch "weights and ſprings of rewards and puniſh-"ments, as clocks and watches (ſuppoſing "them to *feel* what is done unto them) are re-"warded and puniſh'd withal; yet in truth and "reality, according to this ſuppoſition, there "is nothing *intrinſecally* good or evil, there is "nothing *perſonally* juſt or unjuſt, there is no "behaviour of rational creatures in any degree "*acceptable* or *unacceptable* to God Almighty. "*Religion* there can be none without a *moral* "*difference* of things; a *moral difference* of things "there cannot be, where there is no place for "*action*; and [*proper*] *action* there cannot be "without *liberty*."

And yet a certain author *, ſpeaking concerning the *evil* actions of rational beings, makes no difficulty to affirm, that ſuch is the influence

* Vid. *A late ſermon on* Pſal. ciii. 19. *call'd*, A Practical Diſcourſe on divine Providence, *p.* 7, 8.

of

of God's providence, " It *determines* every mo-
" tion of the will, [*whether good or evil*] as well
" as thoſe acts which are proper to the outward
" man." And this providence which, he ſuppoſes, does thus *determine* every motion of our wills, he makes to be an *abſolute*, *arbitrary*, *irreſiſtible*, and *unchangeable* providence. So that according to this gentleman we are bound upon pain of *eternal death* to *reſiſt* that which is *irreſiſtible*, and to *change* that which is *unchangeable*. And this conſequence, though ſo very ſhocking, he is not afraid to own, not only with regard to *fallen*, but *innocent* creatures. " *Nor can I con-*
" *ceive* (ſays he) *any other reaſon of the entrance*
" *of ſin on the angelick or humane nature, which*
" *were both created pure and upright, but this, that*
" *God was pleaſed to withhold thoſe ſupporting*
" *influences* (*viz.* before they were forfeited)
" *which were* eſſentially neceſſary *for their ſtand-*
" *ing in their purity and uprightneſs, upon which*
" *their fall* neceſſarily *enſued* ". Hereby making the *actual fall* of angels and men as *neceſſary* as their very *exiſtence and being*; and ſo, to be no more their real *fault* that they were *ſinners*, than it was their fault that they were *creatures!* Now the caſe ſtanding thus, *i. e.* when a man in his ſearches into the nature of things, finds his inquiries leading him towards ſuch notions, as if they ſhould prove true, would manifeſtly ſubvert the very *eſſences* of good and evil; the leaſt that a ſober minded man can in ſuch a caſe be ſuppoſed to owe to *God*, to *virtue*, to the *dignity* of the *rational nature*, is, " That he ought (as
" one expreſſes it) to be in the higheſt degree
" fearful and ſuſpicious of himſelf, leſt he be
" led away by any *prejudice*, leſt he be de-
" ceiv'd by any *erroneous argument*, leſt he ſuffer
" himſelf

" himſelf to be impos'd upon by any *wrong in-*
" *clination.* Too great an aſſurance in argu-
" ments of this nature, (even though at preſent
" they ſeem'd demonſtrations) rejoicing in the
" ſtrength of them, and taking pleaſure in
" carrying of ſuch a cauſe, is what a good man
" can never be capable of. To ſuch a perſon
" [viz. *to a good man*] the finding his own argu-
" ments unanſwerable, would be the greateſt
" grief; triumphing in ſo melancholy a field
" would be the higheſt diſſatisfaction; and no-
" thing could afford ſo pleaſing, ſo agreeable a
" diſappointment, as to find his own reaſonings
" ſhewn to be inconcluſive.*"

I am very ſenſible of the popular topicks made uſe of to bring an *odium* upon the advocates of *moral liberty:* They are, upon all occaſions, repreſented as enemies to *free grace*, to the *efficacy of divine providence*, and to the *infallibility of ſcripture prophecies.*

But none, you'll bear me witneſs, is a more zealous contender for *free grace* than your brother: Only it is, indeed, for ſuch grace [or gracious aſſiſtances] as may be had, as is *freely promiſed*; and not for ſuch as God has left himſelf *free* to withhold, after all that the creature *can do* to procure it; nay, which God is reſolved *notwithſtanding* to *deny* unto the moſt; who yet for the *want of it* ſhall not only be *deny'd heaven*, but ſhall ſuffer the *vengeance of eternal fire.* Should it be ſaid, that to ſuppoſe the *grace* of God *within the reach of the creature* is to deſtroy its *freeneſs*; may not it deſerve to be conſider'd? That if it ceaſes to be *free*, when

* Dr. *Clark*'s Remarks on a Book, entitled, A Philoſophical Enquiry concerning humane Liberty, *p.* 45, 46.

it

it is *possible to be had*, or is what the creature *may procure*; does it not cease to be *grace* or *favour*, when it is *impossible to be had*, or is what the creature *cannot procure?* The *grace* or *favour* lies, I conceive, in the *attainableness* of saving help; the *freeness* of the *grace*, in the *undeservedness* of the *promise* to those that seek it. God's gracious assistance may be *free* in the *offer*; and yet it may be left to the *free act* of the creature, whether he will put himself under the efficacious influence of it or no.

And what an odd idea must we have of the *divine providence*, to suppose, God cannot govern the creature's actions with *wisdom* and *holiness*, without being the *author* of all the *folly* and *evil* of them? Such a *total* and *natural* dependance upon our maker, as makes him the *real* and *intire* author of all that we *are* and *do*, must imply, that either all our *volitions* and *actions* are very *good*, or that *God*, the *only author* and cause of all, is very *bad*.

Then as to what is insinuated concerning *scripture prophecies*; I readily allow, that every such prophecy is not only true, but infallibly true, in the *sense* of the prophecy: But then, is it not much safer, for this very reason, to suppose, that what is *absolutely foretold*, no longer depends upon the *liberty* or *free* pleasure of the creature, whether it shall be or no? or what doth yet depend upon the *liberty* or *free* pleasure of the creature, whether it shall exist or not, is only *conditionally foretold?* If by an action's being left to the *freedom of man's will*, we mean, that it is left unto a *principle* which is *absolutely unfix'd* unto either side as yet, but which has a *real power* to fix it self *either way*; and if by the subject of an *infallible prediction* or prophecy, we intend some thing

thing that is *abſolutely fixed* one way; then we undertake to prove by ſcripture prophecies, that the *ſame action* and *event* may be both *fixed* and *unfixed* at the ſame time, or that a *flat contradiction* is *true*. And ſo at this rate of arguing, I and you may both widely differ about theſe things, and yet be both in the right, and of one mind.

Should it be urg'd, that a *liberty* of *indifference* in the creature, or a *freedom* in any inſtance *to act* or *not to act*; to do this or that, ſtrikes at the *fore-knowledge* of God, and ſhuts out at leaſt ſome actions or events from God's *eternal preſcience*.

To this I ſhall only anſwer here, that God *ever knew* all that was *ever true*, I unfeignedly believe: And they who ſay he ever knew *more*, ſeem to me to talk *ignorantly* for God. I equally believe, it was *ever true* that an agent thus free *might* ſin; but they who add, it was *ever true*, that it alſo *muſt* or *would* ſin, I am afraid talk *wickedly* for God. All *eternal truths*, I acknowledge, God *knew* to be *true from eternity*; but ſuch things as were *only* true *in time*, cannot, I think, be *known* to be true *before all time*, no, not by the divine mind it ſelf. For what perfection in knowledge can it be, to know a thing to be true before it is true? no more than it is to know a thing to be *paſt* while it is *preſent*.

However, you will, doubtleſs, agree with me in this; that there is nothing we ſhould guard againſt more, than againſt the ſin of *transferring the fault* of the *creature* unto the *Creator*. So that though it may appear plauſible at firſt, to make God not only the *principal* but the *only* agent in what is *good*; yet to make him *ſo the author* of all that is *ſpiritually good*, as (by a

juſt

juſt conſtruction) to leave him the *real author* of all that's *ſpiritually evil* too, muſt be highly *criminal*. Is it not in effect to ſay, all the *prodigies* and *monſters* which are found in the *moral world*, are not *enormous* and *miſhapen*, ſave only in our *weak* and *miſtaken* fancy; but are, every one of them, the *regular* and *beautiful* products of exquiſite *ſkill* and infinite *wiſdom*, even the birth of the eternal counſels of a moſt *holy* and *gracious* God? Let us therefore take a more particular view, in the two firſt letters, of what I have but glanc'd upon elſewhere; I mean, of the MORAL AGENCY of the accountable creature, whether conſider'd in its *original* or *lapſed* ſtate.

SECT. I.

Of moral agency *in general.*

A *Moral agent* is one who is *capable* of a *moral government*.

A *moral government* is a government by *laws*, enforc'd by *rewards* and *puniſhments*, and inſtituted for the *common good*, *i. e.* for the good of the body or ſociety govern'd. It is, as it reſpects mankind, a ſort of humane incloſure; and is then regular, when ſuch incloſure is made (if not with the expreſs conſent of its members, at leaſt) for theſe equitable ends, the better to *defend* their *mutual rights*, as alſo to *ſecure* and *promote* their *mutual intereſts*; and all this in ſuch a way, as is not *really injurious* to the *rights* and *juſt intereſts* of others.

The rights and intereſts of men are either of a *civil* or *religious* nature; do appertain either unto

the things which are *Ceſar*'s, or unto the things which are *God*'s; or (which amounts much to the ſame) do relate unto the *animal* or *ſpiritual* life and welfare of mankind.

It is our undoubted right to incloſe or to form our ſelves into ſocieties, for *religious* as well as *civil* purpoſes, for the ſecurity and advancement of our mutual rights and intereſts of one kind, as well as the other.

It is neceſſary to the *well-being* (if not the very *being*) of every ſociety, be it *civil* or *religious*, to have ſome known and fixed rules and laws to regulate and govern its members by; which rules ought not to contain any thing, which the *will* of the moſt high God revealed unto them, forbids or diſallows.

Every ſuch ſociety ought to form the rules or meaſures of its government agreeable to the diſpenſation they are under; and they who are chriſtians, agreeable to the chriſtian diſpenſation or revelation, the great ſtandard of their faith and practice.

Our ſovereign lord and maſter has not conſtituted or appointed any *viſible head on earth*, to whom ſocieties are bound to appeal, as to an *infallible judge*, in order to know, whether the rules they govern themſelves by, *be* or *be not* conſonant to their ſtandard, or to the diſpenſation they are under.

It is the unqueſtionable right of every *chriſtian ſociety* to examine and determine for it ſelf, *whether* and *how far* its rules are founded upon and agreeable to the *chriſtian revelation*.

The rules of ſuch ſocieties, without their own conſent, fall not properly under the cognizance or cenſure of any other ſociety on earth, further than their determinations are injurious

unto

unto others; in which caſe the parties aggrieved, or in danger, have a right unto *ſelf-defence*.

The rules of one religious ſociety may not be impos'd upon another religious ſociety, without its leave; no more than two independent kingdoms have a power to make civil laws for each other, againſt one another's will.

As every ſociety, whether *civil* or *religious*, hath a right to chuſe its own rules, under the limitations now explained; ſo it has an equal right to defend them, and to encourage an obedience to them by ſuch ſanctions, as the *perverſneſs* of its *members*, the *intereſts* of *private views*, and the *importance* of the caſe ſhall require, *i. e.* it is the buſineſs of all *moral government*, whether *civil* or *religious*, to take care of the *common good*, whether *temporal* or *ſpiritual*; and to guard and advance the publick weal by *wiſe* and *ſuitable laws*; and to enforce theſe laws by rewards and puniſhments, ſo *plain*, *intelligible*, and *weighty* in their *promiſe* or *threatning*, and withal ſo *ſure* and *faithful* in their *performance* or *execution*, as ſhall be effectual to fortify the wills of the governed (whilſt they duly attend to the *meaning*, the *certainty* and *weight* of ſuch ſanctions) againſt the ſtrongeſt ſolicitations of the *fleſh*, whenever its *private intereſts* or views ſhall interfere with thoſe of the *publick*: And as ſhall, by conſequence, be ſufficient to render them inexcuſeable and ſelf-deſtroyed, who by a contempt of ſuch laws and ſanctions ſhall fall a ſacrifice to publick juſtice.

To this end, that government which is *divine*, or which is more *immediately* eſtabliſhed by the great God for the *catholick community* of chriſtians in general (to ſay nothing here of the reſt of mankind) inſures no leſs than *eternal life* unto all

thoſe, who (in the *neglect* of the *ſolicitations*, or in *defiance* of the *complaints* of fleſh and blood) ſhall, by a patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, and honour, and immortality; denouncing at the ſame time indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguiſh againſt ſuch, as (in the ſervice of their various luſts, and in the purſuit of their carnal pleaſures) ſhall dare to be *contentious* and to diſobey the truth, *viz.* that great truth or reaſonable command, *To love God with all our hearts, and our neighbour as our ſelves.*

SECT. II.

NOW concerning this *moral government*, or a government by laws, enforced by rewards and puniſhments, I would obſerve,

Firſt, That every *ſubject*, capable of ſuch a government, muſt be a *real agent*, *i. e.* muſt have a principle of *moving it ſelf*, or of *ſelf-determination*. He that is not in ſuch a ſenſe an agent, has nothing to do; he *does* do nothing, he *can* do nothing; *proper action* is above his ſphere, is beyond his power, as much as it is above or beyond the power of a ſtone to move it ſelf; he is *paſſive* in all his motions; and if at any time he *moves wrong*, it is becauſe he is *moved wrong*; he obeys the law of his creation; the crime, if any, is not his own, but *his*, who is the agent, who acts him; it muſt be imputed to that ſelf-moving principle (call it God, or what you pleaſe) that *directs* and determines his motions.

Secondly, The *immediate principle* of moral agency, in every ſuch ſubject, is the *will*. "All

"morality

" morality depends on the action of the will: " Other faculties are natural, necessary, and " obedient; the *will* only is *empress* and is *free*." Therefore to the *will* it is to be imputed, whatever is done. The *action it self* is indeed *good* or *bad*, by its *agreement* or *disagreement* with the *rule* of conscience; but the *man* is *good* or *bad* by the *will*: Or, he that kills a man *against his will*, is as bad as he that doth it *with his will*: And he that hears a sermon *by constraint*, does as well as he that *chuses* it.

" Now the reason why a *man* can be *good* or " *bad* only by the *act* of the *will*, and not by any " other faculty, is this; the other faculties, " says *Taylor* [1], are like the eye and ear, they " can see and hear foul things, and be never the worse; and good things, and be never the better: But the *will* of man is like " the *hand* and the *mouth*; if the one *touch* foul " things, it is defiled; and if the other *eat* poison, we die. So is the *will* of man, it becomes all one with its object. It works only " by love or hatred, and therefore changes by " the variety of the object it entertains. He " that *loves* a lie, is a *liar*; but he that only " *understands* it, is never the *worse*. ——And " so it is in good things: He that is joined to " the Lord, is one spirit. Love makes the faculty like to the object; and therefore as the " *object* of the *will* is, whose action is *love*, so is " the man *good* or *bad* accordingly.

" But this is not to be so understood, as if the " actions of other faculties could not be sins: " For a sin may be in the *memory*, in the *fancy*, " in the *understanding*, in the *eye*, and in the

[1] *Vid.* Taylor's *Ductor Dubitantium*.

" *mem-*

" *members* of the body. But then in theſe is on-
" ly the *material* part of the ſin; if the actions
" ſubjected in them be *involuntary*, they are
" not *criminal*; they may be *irregular*, but not
" *ſinful*. Only as the WILL *commands* them,
" and they *obey*, ſo they are to ſtand or fall in
" judgment. For ſo *ignorance* is a *ſin*, when it
" is *voluntary*; *The wicked ſay unto God, depart
" from us, for we* DESIRE *not the knowledge of
" thy ways*, Job xxi. 14.

" Now ſince in all the faculties the *will* of
" man only hath a *dominion*, and is the *cauſe* of
" all *moral* actions; from thence they have
" their eſtimate, and are acquitted or con-
" demned accordingly. According to that of
" St. *Bernard*, *Nihil ardet in inferno, niſi pro-
" pria voluntas*, Nothing makes fewel for the
" flames of hell, but the will of man, and evil
" actions that are voluntary and choſen."

Thirdly, As the *will* of the moral creature is the *real agent*, ſo the will, ſo far as it is *accountable*, is a *free agent*, i. e, it either *has* or *had* a power *to act* or *not to act*; or to act *this* or *that*.

It will not be worth the while to inquire here, whether every *real* agent be not alſo a *free* agent? or whether liberty does not enter into the very idea of proper agency? *i. e.* whether any thing can be truly active that is not free, or which has not a power to *act* or to *ſuſpend* its act, or to act *thus* or *thus*. Be this as it will, it muſt be allowed, that uſe has prevailed to call many things [both *natural* and *artificial*] active beings, *viz.* ſuch as were formed for motion; tho' the activity with which they are endowed, be impreſſed upon them in their firſt formation, whether by *nature* or by *art*; and though their principle of motion be not indifferent and free,

but

but determined to one ſide only; as the pulſation of the heart, or the vibration of a pendulum. And we may have occaſion to examine anon, whether it be *eſſential* to the will to *continue* free? Or, whether it may not, in certain inſtances, loſe its natural liberty and grow fixed; whether it be by the *involuntary irradiations* or breakings in of over-powering light, or by a *voluntary application* of the mind unto ſuch light.

It is enough for my preſent purpoſe, that the *will* of an *accountable creature*, conſidered as *accountable*, is ever endow'd with a power, undetermined in its own nature, to the choice either of good or evil, but yet that is capable of determining it ſelf by chuſing or refuſing either. My reaſon is, becauſe we can be no more *accountable* for the act of another, which we could not hinder, and which we did not *freely* chuſe, as to the good or bad changes that are wrought in us thereby, than we can be accountable for our exiſtence. Upon the ſame foot as any will impute to me the blame or the praiſe of my *corruption*, *integrity*, or *renovation* in ſuch a caſe, they may go farther, and give me the *praiſe* of my *creation* too. As to the devil's temptations and influence; our *accountableneſs*, I conceive, comes in, where the *irreſiſtibleneſs* of ſuch temptations ceaſe. And though I am far from thinking, that ſalvation is of our ſelves; it is, doubtleſs, the light that quickens, the truth that ſanctifies, conſidered as in the hand of the ſpirit; yet to *come* unto this light, and to apply this ſaving truth, I take to be our part, and to be our *free act*, ſo far as we are truly accountable for the performance, or non-performance of it. But more of this in its proper place.

It

It is, in my apprehenſion, ſaying nothing; to allow, that the will, conſider'd abſtractedly from ſuch and ſuch circumſtances, is free to turn either way, if thus or thus circumſtantiated, it be neceſſarily determined to turn only one way. He who orders thoſe circumſtances, determines the will; and if it determines wrong, the fault (as has been obſerved) if any, muſt be *his*. The creature is perfectly innocent, and is obedient to the immutable laws of its creation; which is to turn with the heavieſt weight. It matters not, whether the weight be ſmall or great, be ſenſible or inſenſible: If a *feather* or an *atom* will turn the balance of the will, and it was ever out of the power of the will to prevent that feather or that atom, the will is as neceſſarily determined unto what is ſinful, as if a *mountain* was flung into the ſcale.

But if in humane actions, *i. e.* in actions of morality there be a fate, " Then (as Biſhop " *Taylor* juſtly obſerves) there is *no contingency*, " and then all deliberation were the greateſt " folly in the world; becauſe, ſince only one " part is poſſible, the other part is but a chi- " mera, and ſo not ſubject to conſultation. —— " No man repents that he could not ſpeak as " ſoon as he was born: ——He that *repents*, " is troubled for doing what he *ought not*, and " what he *need not*. If there be no liberty in " the will, a *fool* and a *wiſe man* differ not, a " *lazy man* and a *diligent*, a *good man* and a *bad*, " ſave only one hath a better ſtar; they differ " as a *ſtrong man* and a *weak*; but though one " be the *better thing*, he is not the *better man*.

" Add to this, if all our actions were prede- " termined, then (as one man were not better " than another, ſo) there could be no diffe-

" rence

" rence of rewards in heaven or earth. God " might give *what* he pleaſes, but he ſhall *reward* " none, no, not in any ſenſe whatſoever. And " chriſtian princes, he goes on, may as well " hang a true man as a thief, becauſe this man " no more breaks his law than the other: Nei- " ther of them do [properly] obey or diſobey; " but it is fortune that is hanged, and fortune " that is advanced. And there is no ſuch thing " as virtue, no praiſe, and no law."

Fourthly, Though the *will*, ſo far as it is *accountable*, is a *free agent*; yet it is not *ſo free*, but that it may be *fixed* by its *own act*. True, the active powers of the body, ſo far as the will is anſwerable for their actions, are *at liberty* to do, or not to do this or that, as the *will* ſhall *command* or pleaſe: Yet the will may not be *always at liberty* to *command either*, or to be pleas'd with either. It may, like the magnetick needle, put an end to its own tremblings and inconſtancy, and fix it ſelf in a ſtate of reſt, till a diſappointment ſhews its error, or it be diſturbed by the ſolicitations of a different ſcene of things, in which ſhe ſhall conceive her own happineſs or miſery to be differently intereſſed than before. For as all *liberty* is, in its original and primary deſign, given for the *benefit of the agent* that enjoys it; ſo it is therefore given, that the *agent it ſelf might fix it*, and fix it ſo as may beſt favour and carry on its true and laſting happineſs. This is ſo far from being a reſtraint or diminution of freedom, that it is the very improvement and benefit of it. It is not an *abridgment*, it is the *end* and *uſe* of our liberty.

Fifthly, As the *will* can *fix* its own freedom, and determine the indifferency of its own power to this or that; ſo the way in which this *fixed-*

neſs is introduced, or this determination is made, is by an *application* of the mind (whether partially or impartially) to the *light* or evidence *within its reach.*

To ſay that the will, though it cannot chuſe without evidence [without a motive or excitement;] yet it may chuſe againſt all evidence [againſt all motives or excitements] *perceived* and *weighed*, is, to me, all one as to ſay, tho' a ſhip cannot ſail without wind; yet it may ſail againſt all winds. The will can do no more than put it ſelf as it *can*, under the influence of light and evidence, of motives and encitements; and if there be nothing in the object thus preſented to operate upon and determine the faculty, it muſt remain, after all, a fantaſtical, whimſical power: And whether it chuſes *well* or *ill*, can be no more virtuous or vicious in its choice, than the lucky or unlucky, but *caſual* concourſe of atoms, or the *blind* determinations of chance or fortune are ſo.

Such a liberty is only a ſnare to the will, and makes it as uncapable of praiſe or diſpraiſe, as an immutable fixedneſs to one ſide. The will, upon this principle, ever directing its choice by humour or accident, even where reaſon really approves its choice. And the will cannot (no, not it ſelf) be certain, it ſhall chuſe the ſame thing twice, or two moments together. It muſt, upon this hypotheſis, be a principle liable to an eternal flutter, but uncapable of any ſteady purpoſes or purſuits whatſoever.

The will, I readily grant, cannot chuſe without an *object* to chuſe, *i. e.* it cannot chuſe *ſomething*, where there is *nothing*: Yet this, I apprehend, it is not in its nature indifferent to all objects, after evidence has been examined. But

as the neceſſity of action comes on, the mind ſums up the evidence [the motives or excitements to action] whether partially or impartially, and proceeds to a practical judgment; which judgment becomes a fixed rule to its own conduct, till a different face of affairs ſhall invite it to freſh inquiries and other reſolutions. The will ſtands bound by its own act or choice, till a new ſtate of things preſented, or a ſecond review of the old ſtate (brought on by ſome diſappointment, or unexpected incident or occurrence) ſets it free again from the virtuous or vicious *laws*, it had made unto it ſelf.

The ſum is this; there is in every moral agent a radical liberty, determinable by nothing but it ſelf, conſidered as an *accountable* creature; a liberty to put the reaſons, that are within its reach, into the ſcales or not, to put only ſome or all; to obſerve or not obſerve, which of them truly preponderate [weigh heavieſt.] And ſuch is the make of the will, it does in its own nature follow (ſuppoſing it to come *now* to a determination) what appears at this time, and upon ſumming up the evidence, to be of the greateſt weight, or beſt for it ſelf, *i. e.* what appears *beſt* to chuſe for its *preſent end*, or as a *means* to purſue its *choſen* end. "The certainer "ſuch determination is (ſays *Lock*) the greater "is the perfection. Nay, were we determined "by any thing, but the laſt reſult of our own "minds, judging of the good or evil of any "action, we were not free.——Man would be "under the determination of ſome other than "himſelf, which is want of liberty.——To de"ny that a man's will, in every determination, "follows his own judgment, is to ſay, That a "man *wills* and *acts* for an end that he would

" not have at the time that he *wills* it, and *acts*
" for it. For, if he prefers it in his preſent
" thoughts before any other, it is plain he then
" thinks better of it, and would have it before
" any other: Unleſs he can *have* and *not have* it,
" *will* and *not will* it at the ſame time; a contra-
" diction, ſays he, too manifeſt to be admitted *.

Sixthly, The *light* or *evidence* applicable to the mind, and adapted to direct and fix the will of man, is either that which points out the real and *beſt pleaſure* of our *animal life*, and the *fitteſt means* to obtain and prolong that pleaſure; or which diſcovers the proper, the compleat and *laſting happineſs* of our *ſpiritual life*, with the ſhorteſt and *ſafeſt way* that leads to it.

To live to the purpoſes of our *animal life* only, though it be by gratifications the moſt ſuitable and innocent in their own nature, and by the beſt concerted meaſures; yet this alone can raiſe us no higher than to a level with *rational animals*, and will denominate us, at beſt, but a *wiſer ſort of brutes*. This we may call the *religion of nature*, if we will, or rather the *religion of animals*; for it is in reality no more than what, by an animal ſagacity and experience, we may arrive at. But it is not the *religion* to which *life and immortality* are promiſed; or which the laws and ſanctions of revelation were chiefly calculated to promote. Our meer ſenſitive appetites, with the ſenſible objects that every where encompaſs us, joined with the common obſervations of a carnal mind [or of the natural or animal man] are ſufficient to direct and encourage us in theſe low purſuits.

* Vid. *Lock* on the humane underſtanding, *Chap.* xxi. about power, *Sect.* 48.

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The buſineſs of *revelation* is to ſhew us a nobler good, ſuch as makes the *carnal* [or fleſhly] mind enmity againſt the God, who recommends it; and unwilling, nay unable to be ſubject to the laws that enjoin the purſuit of it; and therefore what fleſh and blood muſt not be conſulted about, but denied, in order to obtain. It ſets before us an *active benevolence* and good-will to the *whole ſpecies* of mankind, as our mark; and makes the *happineſs* of communities *in general*, or what tends to the true and beſt intereſt of the humane race in *both worlds*, our grand duty. Revelation teaches us to deny theſe animals we carry about with us, not only their ſelf-injurious and inordinate enjoyments, but their more regular and beneficial gratifications, when the more publick utility or good apparently calls for it. And that we may find our account in living to ſuch generous and worthy ends, revelation aſſures us our loſſes ſhall be repaired with unſpeakable advantage by the righteous and kind governor of the univerſe, if not in this life, however in a future and everlaſting ſtate of retribution. And the more to work upon our fear, the ſtrongeſt paſſion, it diſſuades us from a ſelfiſh, ſenſual courſe (when it tends, though not to the prejudice of our *animal life*, at leaſt to the *more publick* detriment or loſs) by ſevere prohibitions enforced with the threatnings of inſupportable and eternal vengeance. Now,

Seventhly, That man may not (by a *miſapplication* or a *neglect* of the light and evidence that ſurrounds him) make for himſelf a *wrong choice*, "He has, conſider'd as an accountable creature, a *power to ſuſpend* the act of his choice "from being determined *for* or *againſt* the thing "propoſed, till he has examined, whether it

" be really of a nature, in it self and conse-
" quences, to make him happy or no." And as he has a power to suspend his determinations; so it is therefore given him, that he might examine and take care of his own happiness, and look that he be not deceived. And that he might not be deceived, his kind creator hath took care, that such reasons, for his duty, and on the side of his real happiness, shall be in his reach, as shall vastly outweigh *in themselves* any thing he can possibly put into the opposite scale against them. And God has given him a power to put these reasons under his own eye, *all* as well as *some*, and *impartially* to observe the difference upon the *whole*. The faithful use of which power is that which makes him a *good agent*; and the neglect or abuse of it, in any instance or degree, is that which denominates him a *sinful agent*.

" The power to suspend the execution or
" satisfaction of any of our desires, and a power
" to consider the objects of them, to examine
" them on all sides round, and to weigh them
" with others, is that, says *Lock*, in which the
" *liberty* of man doth chiefly consist. And from
" the not using of it aright comes all that va-
" riety of mistakes, errors, and faults, which we
" run into, in the conduct of our lives, and our
" endeavours after happiness; whilst we preci-
" pitate the determination of our wills, and en-
" gage too soon before due examination. For
" when upon due examination we have judged,
" we have done *our duty*, all that we *can* or
" *ought* to do, in pursuit of our happiness; and
" it is not a fault, but a perfection of our na-
" ture to *desire*, *will*, and *act* according to the
" last result of a fair examination."

" And

" And here we may ſee, ſays the ſame " author, how it comes to paſs, that a man " may juſtly incur puniſhment, notwithſtand- " ing. For tho' his *will* be always determined " by that which is judged *good* by his *under-* " *ſtanding*, yet it excuſes him not; becauſe by " too haſty a choice of his own making, he has " impos'd on himſelf wrong meaſures of good " and evil; which however falſe and fallacious, " have the ſame influence on all his future con- " duct, as if they were true and right. He has " viciated his own palate, and muſt be anſwer- " able to himſelf for the ſickneſs or death that " follows from it. The eternal law and nature " of things muſt not be alter'd to comply with " his ill-order'd choice. If the neglect or abuſe " of the liberty he had to examine what would " really and truly make for his happineſs, miſ- " leads him, the miſcarriages that follow it, " muſt be imputed to his own election."

And ſo much for the *moral agency* of the creature *in general*.

SECT. III.

Of the moral agency of the creature conſider'd in its original *ſtate.*

THE ſtate of angels and man in innocency I take to be this: God intending to be glorified by *free obedience*, ſet before the angels happineſs and miſery; and before our grand parents, life and death. They might put their hand to which they would; only what they choſe ſhould be their portion. They were inſtructed

ſtructed *how* to chuſe; the *nature* of things, and the *event* of all actions were opened unto them, and their wills were invited with amiable excellencies and glorious objects; and then they were left to themſelves, not to their *natural ſtrength*, but to their *own choice*. They ſhould have an happier ſtate (either as to the *degrees* of happineſs, or as to the *ſecurity* of their happineſs, or as to *both*) than their native powers could raiſe them to, if they would but chuſe it: And chuſe it they might and would, had they but duly weigh'd it; which the liberty of their wills did enable them to do, and which the importance of the caſe call'd for.

If angels and man had not a power, by their creation, to *ſtand* or *fall*, but were (without their own choice) put into ſuch circumſtances as they *could not prevent*, and yet *could not reſiſt*, but which did inevitably determine them to one ſide, and that the wrong ſide too; then they were ſo far from being *moral* agents, that they were not, in theſe circumſtances, any agents at all; were at beſt but *intelligent machines*, pieces of thinking paſſive matter; were not *active*, but *acted* by ſome foreign invincible impulſe. And ſo the devil was ſo far from being in any *guilty* ſenſe, *acceſſary* to man's deſtruction, or *Adam* to that of his poſterity's, that they were neither of them either *principals* or *acceſſaries* in their own deſtruction.

And (by the way) if this be our preſent ſtate, whether it be by the law of our creation, or as a puniſhment of *Adam*'s fall; yet ſtill we have no *actual* tranſgreſſions of our own, nor are we *capable* of any. For, according to this view of things, we muſt be uncapable of acting at all, whether right or wrong; and when we move (let

(let it be either *with* or *againſt* law) we are only actuated and moved by another, by ſomething without us. This therefore may be laid down as an undeniable principle, that as ſure as angels and man in innocency were under a *moral* government, ſo ſure it is, that they were truly agents, *i. e.* had a principle of ſelf-motion, or of ſelf-determination.

This *freedom* of their wills, in their *pure* and *created* ſtate, and the *leaving* them (for a while at leaſt) to the *uſe* of this freedom, appear every way agreeable to the *reaſon of things*, and to the *divine goodneſs*.

1. To the *reaſon of things*. A meer dependance upon the ſuſtaining influences of their maker cannot be juſtly pleaded in bar of this liberty or freedom. Did the doctrine of an univerſal ſuſtentation conclude the deity to be the *immediate principle* of all action; and (by conſequence) was it found to exclude a *ſelf-determining power* in the creature; then the very notion of government by *laws* would ceaſe. Had the whole intelligent creation no proper action of their own, but were they intirely managed and actuated by the divine power, "Then the moſt "ſerious affairs of the world (as one expreſſes "it) muſt be regarded as a meer ludicrous ſcene "or dance of puppets. A ſet of beings *capable* "of the *knowledge* of their *duty*, but *deſtitute* of "the *ability* to *act* it, muſt be leſs capable ſub-"jects of government by *laws*, than the intelli-"gent trees in the fabulous *Dodona*'s grove:" *Whoſe trees were vocal, and return'd the anſwers of the oracle.*

"But if the ſuſtentation of the *being* of a "creature be conceived inconſiſtent with a *ſelf-*"*determining power* in the creature, in order to

 "action,

" action, it muſt either be on ſuppoſition that
" the Deity *could not* produce and preſerve ſuch
" a diſtinct power in the creature, conſiſtently
" with ſuch a ſuſtentation; or elſe that he *would*
" *not* do it. As for the *former* ſuppoſition, it is
" ſufficient to obſerve, that no good reaſon can
" be aſſigned, why the production of a *diſtinct*
" *power* ſhould be thought leſs poſſible than the
" creation of a *diſtinct ſubſtance*. And as the
" Deity ſuſtains or preſerves the *ſubſtance* of his
" creatures ſo, as that it ſtill remains (not-
" withſtanding the moſt intimate penetration)
" ſufficiently diſtinguiſh'd from his own; ſo by
" parity of reaſon, he may as well be ſuppoſed
" to ſuſtain or preſerve the *power* of a creature
" ſo, as that it may ſtill retain its *diſtinction* and
" *capacity* of becoming a *proper principle of action*.
" And as for the *latter* ſuppoſition, *viz.* that
" the deity *would not* produce and preſerve ſuch
" a *ſelf-determining power* in a creature; 'tis a
" ſufficient confutation to remark, that it is ir-
" reconcileable to the notion of a perfectly wiſe
" Being (ſuch as is the Deity) to ſuppoſe him
" to act without any valuable end or deſign.
" But to impart a *capacity* to *know* our duty,
" without beſtowing an *ability* to *execute* it,
" would have been to have imparted it for no
" wiſe and valuable end. And can we enter-
" tain ſo mean an idea of the wiſeſt as well as
" greateſt of Beings, as to imagine he would
" raiſe this glorious ſtructure of the world only
" to ſerve as a ſcene for *intelligent machines* to be
" *moved* and *actuated* in, (and that for the moſt
" part in ſo ridiculous and inſignificant a man-
" ner) for no other end but to divert himſelf
" with the trifling ſpectacle."

I would

I would add further; ſince all will allow, they have an *idea*, a clear and diſtinct idea of the *liberty* we are talking of, (whether there *be* or ever *was* any *free power* in the creature to anſwer this idea or no) then may it not deſerve to be conſider'd, whether the very *idea* of the power does not imply the *exiſtence* of the power? whether it be poſſible for creatures that are ſuppoſed to be under an abſolute and univerſal *neceſſity* in all their thoughts, volitions and actions, and that converſe with nothing elſe, ſhould be able to raiſe in their own minds any nobler idea than that of *neceſſity*? Whether the very *notion* of *liberty* does not infer a *liberty* ſome where, either in our ſelves or in thoſe about us; or at leaſt the *poſſibility* of the power?

Now if a *free power* in the creature be a *poſſible* thing, will it be eaſy to aſſign any reaſon, why we ought not to believe it is a *real thing*, or that we have the *power it ſelf*? ſince by the law of our creation we have (whether we will or no) an inward, invincible *conſciouſneſs* of ſuch a liberty *in our ſelves*; and as firm a perſuaſion, grounded upon the niceſt obſervations we can make, that the *reſt of our ſpecies* do in various inſtances enjoy the ſame freedom, *viz.* that every one has a real power to *do* ſome things that he *leaves undone*; and to *leave undone* ſome things that he *actually does*. This *idea of liberty*, and a *conſciouſneſs that we have it*, ſeem to be deeply imprinted by our Creator upon the minds of all.

Now this muſt be either to *no purpoſe*; or be deſigned as an art of vexation, and an inſtrument of torment to *evil purpoſe*; (while conſcience is irreſiſtibly determined to ſting us for not being better, than we were really capable of be-

ing; and every one is led to blame and afflict his neighbour for what he could never hinder;) or else it must be intended to perſuade us of a power we actually have; and ſo to be the means of a reward, and the way to felicity by the advantage of a *free* and *wiſe choice*; and this is to very *good purpoſe*. Beſides, if there were no liberty in the creature, there could be nothing *contingent*, all things would be *neceſſary*; and, conſequently, would neceſſarily bear upon them the characters or marks of the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of the firſt mover: And having no liberty at all, they could never be at liberty to act otherwiſe, but would be under a neceſſity to continue to move rightly and wiſely to eternity. Nothing could be wrong or fooliſh, but would, in every circumſtance and degree, be as perfect and as good as it *ſhould be*, and as it was *poſſible to be*. And ſo to *lie*, would be as praiſe-worthy as to *ſpeak the truth*; and to *kill an innocent perſon* as worthy an action as to *ſave his life*. The *former* would, upon this ſuppoſition, be perfectly right in its kind; and the *latter* would be no more.

As to what Mr. *Hobbs* ſuppoſes, That "nothing taketh beginning from *it ſelf*, but from "the action of ſome other immediate *agent*, "without it ſelf." * *i. e.* Nothing can *move it ſelf*, but *is* and *muſt be* moved *by another*. I would obſerve,

1*ſt*. That was the ſuppoſition *univerſally true*, the *divine being* it ſelf would be *no principle* of its own actions, but muſt depend upon the action of ſome other agent, *before* or *without* it ſelf, in all its determinations. It would argue an infinite

* *Vid.* His treatiſe of liberty and neceſſity, *p.* 71.

and

and eternal ſucceſſion of cauſes and effects, or rather of effects only, without any firſt and real cauſe. For if there be a firſt cauſe, action muſt begin in that cauſe, and not from another: But if there be no firſt cauſe, then there muſt be an endleſs proceſſion of effects without any cauſe at all; which is to aſcribe an *infinite effect* to *nothing*, rather than allow an *infinite ſomething* as its *cauſe*; which is down-right atheiſm. But,

2*dly*. If the ſuppoſition is to be underſtood only of *creatures*, then he allows that the acts of the *Creator* take their beginning from himſelf, and not from the action of ſome other immediate agent without himſelf; and therefore that a principle or ſelf-determination is not a contradiction in terms, but a very poſſible thing, in that it is a perfection which is actually exiſting in the firſt cauſe. So that the only diſpute will be, whether it be a communicable perfection or no? Or, whether this ſelf-moving principle be any part of that likeneſs or image, which our maker has imparted to angels and men? Or, whether the creation of an *active being*, of one that is *truly ſo*, be an over-match for his infinite wiſdom and power, any more than the creation of a being *meerly paſſive*.

3*dly*. Since every ſpecies of beings finds it ſelf more inclined and capable of communicating its own likeneſs, than that which is unlike it ſelf; why ſhould we think it leſs becoming, or leſs poſſible for the divine being to derive unto ſome of his creatures a *ſelf-moving principle* (which is what he certainly has himſelf, and which is therefore a branch of his own image) than for the divine being to derive only a *power to be moved*, and acted upon by ſome thing without; which (if it was poſſible to be found

in himself) is at least a more disputable branch of the divine likeness.

4thly. Or, if it be for the glory of our creator, that all, even the noblest of his creatures, should be *wholly passive*, and moved by another; can any reason be assigned (as has been already observed) why such creatures should be *capable* of the *idea of liberty*, at least of *thinking themselves endowed* with so divine a principle? Or, if the notion of liberty was proper to be communicated to creatures, that they might ascribe this glory to their maker; had not a double care been needful, that man, in all the acts of his will, should *feel* himself impelled and moved by another, that he might not be tempted to assume this peerless honour unto himself? However, that he should be as much as possible removed from any consciousness or inward sense of such an innate, concreated, inbred principle, that there might be nothing in the make and constitution of his nature to prompt or betray him into this mistake? And this was the rather needful, because the divine laws themselves, with the rewards and punishments annexed to them, do so naturally and so powerfully dispose us to a belief, that we were not in our creation determined to one side only, but might have chosen obedience as well as disobedience, and life as well as death?

5thly. But be this as it will; were we to err in this matter, it were infinitely more safe (even in our fallen state) to err *on the side* of liberty than *against it*. For if we are *not free*, but *wholly passive*, it can do us no hurt to *think* ourselves free. What I am under a *necessity* to *do* and *be*, I shall *do* and *be* notwithstanding; nay, this very *belief* that I am *free*, will be as

neceſſary as any thing elſe, with all the afflictive thoughts that arife from an *apprehended abuſe* of my freedom. But if we are *really free*, and *think* we have *no freedom*, it may do us much hurt, it may turn to our infinite hurt, as it may tempt us to neglect that part upon which life and immortality depend. Ay, it may not only prove an injury to *our ſelves*, but to the *world* about us, while thoſe valuable talents which were given us for the *publick good*, are either wickedly imploy'd againſt it, or ſlothfully buried, for want of a vigorous and timely reſiſtance againſt the fleſh, the world, and the devil: Beſides, the *abuſe of our liberty* in pleading againſt the *principle of liberty*, may betray the unthinking world, with which we live, into an indolent and ruinous ſtupidity, in the matters of eternal life; whilſt they are led to commit the infinite concernments of their ſouls to the immediate and ſole conduct of the ſpirit, in the neglect of that part upon which his promiſed help and the ſucceſs of the whole depends. To mention nothing here of the innumerable temporal advantages that particular perſons, private families, or more publick ſocieties may loſe; or the temporal evils they may ſuffer, by the unvirtuous inactivity, or vicious compliances, which the belief of ſuch a mechanick, paſſive principle, as the want of liberty in the creature may introduce into the rational world.

2. It is equally agreeable to the *goodneſs* of God, that angels and man ſhould be made *free* at firſt, and *left* (at leaſt *for a while*) unto this freedom.

(1.) That they ſhould be made free at firſt; in as much as the freedom we are pleading for, argues a *nobler ſubſtance* for its foundation, *viz.* that the being who enjoys it, is either a *pure ſpirit*,

ſpirit, or at leaſt *mixt with ſpirit*, and not a ſyſtem of organiz'd matter only: It ſuppoſes a neceſſity of reaſon and underſtanding to direct and fix this free creature; and that inſtinct and mechaniſm are not ſufficient to regulate its motions: It argues the expediency of a divine law to inſtruct it in the ends of its creation, in the buſineſs of its ſupreme happineſs, and in the means to obtain it; and that it is capable of a more excellent government, than creatures that move by the laws of attraction or gravitation: It ſhows a greater likeneſs to its maker, the great ſource and ſtandard of all perfection, whilſt by an imitation of the divine freedom * in its reaſonable motions, the moral creature becomes a ſort of under-creator (within the ſphere of its own powers, *viz.*) of thoughts, volitions, and actions; giving a new modification or turn to its own mind and will, and a new determination to thoſe active powers it carries about it ſelf: Nay, the *real* baſis of all that righteouſneſs and true holineſs, of all thoſe praiſes and rewards which are aſcribed to angels and man, ſeems to be found chiefly (if not wholly) in this *principle of liberty* or freedom in their *moral* actions: And this appears to be the only true and reaſonable foundation of their improvements in virtue, and of their riſing hereby to ſtates of higher capacities and enjoyments.

* "Wherein doth the image of God in man conſiſt? "*Anſ.* It principally conſiſts and moſt eminently appears in "man's ſoul, 1. In its nature and ſubſtance, as it is, like "God, ſpiritual, inviſible, immortal, *&c.* 2. In its powers "and faculties, reaſon or underſtanding, and FREEDOM *in its* "*choice and actions.*" *Vid.* Pool's Annotations *on* Gen. 1. v. 25, 26.

(2.) It

2*dly*. It is as agreeable to the *divine goodneſs*, that they ſhould be *left* (at leaſt *for a while*) to the *uſe* of this freedom. The principle it ſelf, without an opportunity to exert it, would have been uſeleſs and vain: Nay, it is, in effect, to deny there was ever ſuch a *free* power in angels and man, to ſay it was never in their power to have acted freely. So that the *goodneſs* ſhewn in *communicating* the principle it ſelf would have been but a name, a chimera, unleſs the creature had been left, *more* or *leſs* to the conduct of it.

What Mr. *Charnock* obſerves, with reſpect to our grand parent, is much to the preſent purpoſe. "God's *goodneſs*, ſays he, furniſhed "*Adam* with a *power to ſtand*; was it contrary "to his goodneſs to leave *Adam* to the *free uſe* "of that power? —— To what purpoſe did "God make a *law* to govern his rational crea- "tures, and yet reſolve that the creature ſhould "not have its *choice*, whether he would *obey* "*it or not?* Had he been really *conſtrained* to "obſerve it, his obſervation of it could no more "have been called *obedience*, than the *acts of* "*brutes* (that have a kind of natural conſtraint "upon them by the inſtinct of their nature) "can be called *obedience*: And in vain had God "endowed a creature with ſo great and noble "a principle as *liberty*. Had it been *goodneſs* in "God, after he had made a *reaſonable creature*, "to govern him in the ſame manner, as he did "*bruits*, by a *neceſſary inſtinct?* It was the *good-* "*neſs* of God to men and angels, to leave them "in ſuch a condition, to be able to give him "a voluntary [or free] obedience, a nobler "offſpring than the whole creation could pre- "ſent him with: And ſhall his goodneſs be un-

" dervalued and be accounted mean, becauſe " man made an ill uſe of it, and turned it in- " to wantonneſs? " *

But you will ſay, a *principle of liberty* ever implies in its own nature, a *poſſibility* of *abuſing* that liberty; had we not the wretched event it ſelf to witneſs to the truth of this ſad concluſion.

Grant it to be ſo; but then ſince it muſt on the other hand, imply a *poſſibility* alſo of *uſing* it *aright*; muſt not ſuch a principle be a much greater inſtance of *goodneſs* in our Creator, than to *deny* the creature *liberty to ſtand*, and yet to *puniſh* it for *falling*? Or, than to be created in ſuch circumſtances, as made the *virtuous uſe* of what ſome *call* liberty, *impoſſible*, and yet the *abuſe* of it as *fatal*, as if the *virtuous uſe* of it had been not only *poſſible*, but *highly probable*? which yet ſeems to be the opinion of thoſe (or at leaſt, the conſequence of it) who hold ſuch an abſolute decree, or inflexible foreknowledge of the future creatures actual ſin, and eternal miſery, as implies a *neceſſity* of the creature's becoming actually ſinful and eternally miſerable. For they themſelves (when they think proper to ſpeak out) make no difficulty to allow, that it is in truth, not only *poſſible*, but *probable*, *highly probably*, nay, ſtrictly *certain* and abſolutely *neceſſary*, that the ſin and miſery thus decreed or foreknown, ſhould eventually be. Now if this be no way inconſiſtent with infinite goodneſs; much leſs will the caſe before us, be ſo; where the freedom, I am contending for, did leave it *poſſible* indeed, that this freedom might be *abuſed*; but then it was not only *as poſſible* that it might *not be abuſed*, but *highly probable* alſo.

* *Vid.* Mr. *Charnock* on the divine attributes, *p.* 591.

Nay,

Nay, it was *but poſſible* that a creature, with ſuch a *free principle*, and under ſuch advantages of diſcerning its true intereſt, and for judging a right, ſhould notwithſtanding, in contempt of its maker's authority, and to the hazard of its own eternal happineſs, dare to neglect the gift that was in it. So that duty and intereſt, the reaſon and probability of the thing lying ſo ſtrongly and intirely on the ſide of obedience, is what makes the creature's fall ſo inexcuſable and aſtoniſhing.

Beſides (to ſpeak nothing here of the caſe of *Adam*'s poſterity, who were relieved againſt the ruinous effects of their grand parent's fall by the promiſed ſeed:) Beſides, I ſay, with reſpect to the angels that fell; as the offenders are the ſufferers, and muſt blame themſelves only; ſo no injury could accrew to their fellow angels thereby, who maintained their innocency, but unto themſelves alone, and unto ſuch creatures as ſhould be drawn into a cauſeleſs and wicked imitation of their rebellion. Their fall rather ſerved as an awful warning to the reſt, and was improveable to their greater caution; and may be (for ought we know) one ſovereign means of their confirmation; whilſt they ſee in theſe ſad examples of apoſtacy and wretchedneſs, that moral liberty is a talent that may be abuſed to the infinite hurt of the owner; and that the ſanctions of the divine laws are moſt ſure and tremendous in their execution.

However, thus much is plain, if all events and actions were equally neceſſary (as they muſt be without a real *principle of liberty*) *idleneſs* would be as good as *labour*, and *peeviſhneſs* as good as *patience*; the one would be as praiſeworthy as the other. Biſhop *Taylor* therefore

ſeems to argue juſtly, when he tells us (ſpeaking of the accountable creature, or conſidered as in a ſtate of trial) "That difficulty makes "virtue, and the contrariety of objects makes "difficulty, and the various ends and amabilities makes the contrariety, and *liberty* is the "hand and fingers of the ſoul, by which ſhe "picks and chuſes; and if ſhe gathers flowers "(as ſhe is taught) ſhe makes her ſelf a garland "of immortality."

But let this ſuffice for the *moral agency* of the creature, conſidered in its *original ſtate*.

The *moral agency* of the accountable creature, in its *lapſed* and *fallen ſtate*, next follows: But this I ſhall reſerve for my ſecond letter; where I ſhall endeavour to ſtate the true notion of *goſpel grace*, and to ſhew the *real conſiſtency* and *ſweet harmony* between *grace* and *liberty* in the affair of man's *ſalvation*, or *recovery by Chriſt*.

I am, Sir,

Yours, in great affection,

and all ready ſervices,

S. F.

AN

ESSAY

CONCERNING

Grace and *Liberty:*

OR, THE

Moral agency of the accountable creature in its *lapſed* and *fallen* ſtate.

LETTER II.

SECT. I.

SIR,

THAT learned author was certainly in the right, when he obſerves, that in enquiries concerning the efficient cauſe of moral actions, it is common for us to deny one truth for fear of loſing another:

ether: And we will not allow to man a *liberty of choice* in *ſpiritual* actions and *moral* effects for fear of diſparaging the *grace of God:* Whereas it is by the *grace of God* we have this *liberty*; for no man can chuſe what he does not know, and no man can love that which hath no amability [nothing lovely] in it. Now becauſe we have all notices ſpiritual, and the arguments of invitation to obedience in duties evangelical, from revelation and the grace of God; therefore to this we owe the liberty of our wills, *i. e.* a power to chuſe *ſpiritual* things. Grace and truth come by Jeſus Chriſt, and liberty of will in thoſe reſpects come by him alſo; for *if the Son make us free, then are we free indeed.* So far the caſe of *moral* actions and *ſpiritual* are all one; for that action is *moral*, which is done in obedience or diſobedience to a law; and *ſpiritual* is no more, ſave only that it relates to another law, to the evangelical or ſpiritual law of liberty: But in the nature of the thing, it is the ſame, and can as well be choſen, one as the other, when they are equally taught, and alike commanded, and propounded under the ſame proportionable amability or lovelineſs; and till they be ſo, they are not equally laws. But let it be this way, or any other, *we cannot work, till we have power to work; and we cannot chuſe, till we have liberty; and we cannot be under a law, and promiſes and threatnings, if we cannot chuſe.*

Let no man think, that to attribute ſuch a liberty to man now, is to exalt him too much; for tho' it muſt needs ſignify a ſtate much more perfect than that of beaſts, yet it is very imperfect compared with that of angels, and with what we our ſelves expect hereafter; and need not to be envied to mankind, as if it was a jewel

of the celeſtial crown. Alas, it is an imperfection fit to humble us, not to make us proud: "It only ſets us higher than a tulip, and enlarges our borders beyond the folds of ſheep, and the oxens ſtall; but it keeps us in our juſt ſtation, ſervants to God, inferior to angels, and in a *poſſibility* of becoming ſaints. — It is humility and truth to allow man this liberty; and therefore for this we may lay our faces in the duſt, and confeſs that our preſent dignity and excellence ſuppoſes [a liableneſs to] miſery, and is imperfection, though at the ſame time it be the inſtrument and capacity of *all duty* and of all virtue." Nay, it is by a right uſe of our liberty, in a due application of light and evidence, that we fix it for our advantage, and arrive at a ſtate of confirmation in piety and bleſſedneſs. For the very *fixedneſs* of angels and ſpirits above is not *mechanical* but *choſen*, and may (for ought we know) be in part the natural reſult, as well as gracious reward of the regular improvements of their liberty in the day of trial.

However, moſt men, I think, will grant *liberty* of will in actions of *natural life* and *common intercourſe*, though ſome do deny it in *moral actions*, or at leaſt in actions *ſpiritual*: But they don't conſider, that by this means they evacuate and deſtroy the very nature and purpoſe of liberty and choice. "For the denying liberty "in all *moral* and *ſpiritual* things, *i. e.* in "all things of manners, in all things of obe- "dience to the laws of God and man, and the "allowing it in things under no law, is a de- "ſtruction to the very nature and purpoſes of "liberty. The *only end of liberty* is to make us "*capable of laws*, of *virtue* and *rewards*, and to

"diſtinguiſh

" diſtinguiſh us from brutes, by a *diſtinct man-*
" *ner* of approach unto God, and a way of con-
" formity unto him *proper to us*. And except in
" the matter of divine and humane laws, except
" in the matter of virtue and vice, except in or-
" der to reward or puniſhment, liberty and
" choice were good for nothing. For to keep our
" ſelves from harm or poiſon, and enemies,
" a natural inſtinct, and lower appetites, and
" more brutiſh faculties would ſerve our needs,
" as well as the neceſſities of birds and beaſts.
" And therefore to allow it, where it is good
" for nothing, and to deny it, where only it
" can be uſeful and reaſonable, and fit to be
" done, and given by the wiſe father of all his
" creatures, muſt needs be amiſs."

And this is ſo plain a caſe, that the greateſt aſſerters of our captivated ſtate by the fall, have ſome of them been obliged to receed at laſt from the rigour of their opinion. " *Luther*, ſays " Biſhop *Burnet*, went on long, as he at firſt " ſet out, with ſo little diſguiſe, that whereas " *all parties* had always pretended, that they " aſſerted the *freedom* of the *will*, he plainly " ſpoke out, and ſaid the *will* was *not free*, but " *enſlaved:* Yet before he died, he is reported " to have changed his mind; for though he " never own'd that, yet *Melanchon*, who had " been of the ſame opinion, did *freely retract* it; " for which he was never blam'd by *Luther*." *

I ſhall ſhew therefore, that what has been ſaid of angels and man in a *ſtate of innocency*, is, in its meaſure, true of man alſo, conſidered as *reſtored by redemption*, and put into a *new ſtate of trial*.

* *vid.* His Expoſition of the Articles, *p.* 151.

When

When God gives a challenge to the *Iſraelites*, to ſhow any inſtance, wherein he had been wanting to them: *What could I have done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?* Or, what *ought* I to have done more? Is it not as if he had ſaid? Every thing that becomes *me* to do, to make you fruitful, is done already. Your own part, indeed, is ſtill behind, and is all that remains to render mine effectual. All needful help is provided, and put within your reach. Aſk and ye ſhall receive it; ſeek and ye ſhall find it. Even your heart of ſtone I am ready to take away, and to give you a heart of fleſh; I only wait to be enquired of in the uſe of appointed means, that I might do it for you.

And when God challenges them to make any tolerable excuſe for their unfruitfulneſs; WHEREFORE, *when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Sure, none will be able to reply; why, Lord, we were by nature *thorns* and *thiſtles*, and had no *poſſible* means to become *vines* or *fig-trees*: *But can men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thiſtles?* Mat. vii. 16. No, no; God will make it out againſt them at the great day, that under ſuch a cultivation and care, they were capable of what he expected from them. *I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right ſeed,* [done enough to make thee ſo] *how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a ſtrange vine!*

But becauſe the ſeeming oppoſition between *liberty* and *grace* has proved a mighty *prejudice* againſt a due acknowledgment of the *former*, I ſhall endeavour in the next ſection to ſhew the *harmonious* agreement that there is betwixt them in the work of our ſanctification.

SECT. II.

NOW what I have to offer upon the head of GRACE, ſhall be in anſwer to theſe two queries.

Firſt, Whether, beſides the *rule of ſanctification* in the word of God; beſides *Chriſt's example and pattern*; beſides the *external call* by precepts and prohibitions, by promiſes and threatnings, or by the rewards of virtue and puniſhments of vice; and the *internal call* of conſcience, with the *common* ſtrivings of the ſpirit by providential diſpenſations, or otherwiſe; whether beſides all theſe there be any *further help* yet needful to render ſuch aſſiſtances effectual to our ſanctification?

Secondly, If any further help be yet needful, what that *ſincerity* in ſeeking is, to which this remaining help is promiſed?

An anſwer to the firſt query I ſhall return under theſe following propoſitions:

1. Every thing that a wiſe and good God doth inſtitute and appoint, muſt be *ſufficient* for the *ends* of its inſtitution and appointment. To ſay otherwiſe is to impeach the moſt perfect and beſt of Beings of *error* or *deceit*. So that if ſuch means are afforded us, that we might be holy by the aſſiſtance of them, and we be obliged to be holy by theſe helps *alone*; then they muſt, it's plain, be able to make us holy; and the fault muſt be ours, and wholly ours, if we be not ſanctified by them.

But if they were given as only a *part* of thoſe means which are neceſſary for our ſanctification; then they were never deſigned *alone* for this end; and it can be no fault of ours that by theſe *alone*

we

we don't obtain holineſs. The other part being ſuppoſed *neceſſary*, it is impoſſible to be holy without it, without proving at the ſame time it is *not neceſſary* for our holineſs, or that we may be holy without that which is *neceſſary* to make us ſo.

2. We muſt diſtinguiſh betwixt the *means* that are to be uſed by *us*, and thoſe *further means*, which the *ſpirit* of Chriſt is ready to make uſe of *himſelf*, upon the performance of our part, *i. e.* we muſt diſtinguiſh between *our own* and the *ſpirit's work* in our ſanctification. Our own part may be ſufficient for us, in point of *duty*, and in order to entitle us unto the ſpirit's part: Yet it may not be ſufficient for our ſanctification without the ſpirit's part. They may be both needful for our holineſs, though not both needful to be done by us. What is impoſſible for us to do, it is our duty to expect the ſpirit will do: And to blame our ſelves for the non-performance of his part, is to blame our ſelves that we are not the ſpirit of God, or as mighty as he. Yet if there be nothing for us to do towards our ſanctification, nothing that we *can* do; then it is owing to no neglect of ours that we are not ſanctified; and that the whole is not accompliſhed, muſt be charged (if any where) upon him from whom the whole muſt come.

3. We muſt diſtinguiſh betwixt the work of the ſpirit that is neceſſary to *lead the way* to our part, and the work of the ſpirit that is neceſſary to *attend it*, and the work of the ſpirit that is neceſſary to *follow after*, in order to our *real* or *compleat* ſanctification.

[1.] What is neceſſary to *lead the way* to our part muſt be *done* by the ſpirit, before our part can be *due*, can be *poſſible*. In this reſpect it is

not the will of God that we ſhould move *firſt*, but that we ſhould move *after*. Till the ſpirit has prepared the way, and has furniſhed out the help we need, it is not expected that we ſhould act, it is not our ſin to ſtand ſtill; nay, it would not only be in vain, but preſumptuous for us to attempt to move, it would be to aſpire after independency.

Now the ſpirit's previous aſſiſtances are ſuch as theſe: To make a creature capable of a government by laws and ſanctions, it is neceſſary that the ſpirit ſhould *create* in it or *reſtore* to it a *deſire* or *love* to be compleatly and for ever *happy*; that he endow it with capacities to judge, upon an impartial inquiry, into what offers, what is beſt adapted or ſuited to the ends of its happineſs, and what are the fitteſt means to attain thoſe ends. It is further neceſſary, that the ſpirit create in it, or reſtore to it, a principle of liberty to move this way or that way, to ſearch here and there in queſt of true *happineſs*, and of the *way* that leads to it. This is a work needful to go before, either in its creation or reſtoration, in order to put the creature into a ſtate of *trial*. It is alſo requiſite, that he prepare ſuch truths as are ſufficient to direct it to its great end, and to point out the way thither; ſuch truths as are ſufficient to inſtruct the accountable creature in the knowledge of that good which would beatify it, and in the means that are proper for it to uſe in order to come at it, *i. e.* to furniſh out ſuch ſacred verities, ſo clearly explained, ſo well atteſted, and ſo recommended by their intrinſick excellency and promiſed rewards, as are proper and ſufficient (when the creature does (as it may) duly apply them) to produce that dutiful reſpect unto ſuch moral government,

vernment, as the means with which it is intruſted, either can or ought *of themſelves* to produce: *i. e.* It is the ſpirit's part to provide the goſpel, by which life and immortality are brought to light, with the path that leads to them. And this the ſpirit hath done, and is what the apoſtle means, when he tells the converted *Romans*, *As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the goſpel unto you that are at* Rome *alſo. For I am not aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt; for it is the* power *of God unto ſalvation unto every one that believes, to the* Jew *firſt, and alſo to the* Greek, *Chap.* i. 15, 16. Since we are to be ſanctified by the truth, we are not required to be ſanctified by it, before it is revealed: And it is not really revealed, till the object be either brought down and propoſed to our faculties in a diſcernable light, or our faculties raiſed up unto the object.

[2.] There is a work of the ſpirit, that is neceſſary to *attend* our part, and to go along with it.

Our part is now to ſeek, to look out and about us, and to weigh every thing that offers, that we may find what is that good that will make us happy, and what are thoſe means that are appointed to ſecure it. It is to make a virtuous uſe of that principle of liberty we have received; not to ſhut our eyes upon the light; not to take a paſſing and tranſcient view only; not to form our judgments and our reſolutions raſhly; nor yet to ſuſpend and to defer them needleſsly; not to come to a practical concluſion without juſt enquiry, nor yet to delay it, till the evidence grows clouded, languid and feeble again; but to be diligent and impartial in our ſearches, and deliberate and timely in our reſolves,

And

And the ſpirit's part is to maintain the faculties he hath created or reſtored, and are needful to be continued unto ſuch an end; and to preſerve the great ſanctifying truths of the goſpel, with reſpect to their clearneſs and authority; and to keep them not only in being, but within the reach of our enquiries; that theſe ſacred records, with the meaning and certainty of them, may be viſible unto thoſe that are deſirous to ſee them, and to be influenced by them. The ſpirit, that in an extraordinary way inſpired the penmen of ſacred writ at firſt, and furniſhed them with proper credentials of their divine commiſſion, is now in a more ordinary way, at leaſt, by his providential diſpenſations, to cauſe that ſtar to move this way and that way, that thoſe who are groping in the dark for it, may diſcern ſo much of its light, and feel ſo much of its influence, as is needful to enable them to mortify their luſts, and to eſcape deſtruction; to qualify them for holy obedience, and to lead them to the regions of light and life.

Theſe aſſiſtances of the ſpirit, are needful for us to our ſanctification; but then they are aſſiſtances that are already communicated. They are the talents that are put into our hands to trade with; and our *neglect* or *abuſe* of them is that which makes us ſo guilty, and our deſtructions ſo much our own: It is a reſiſting the ſpirit, a counterworking his work, and was the crying ſin of the old world, when he thus ſtrove with them.

WITHOUT *theſe previous and accompanying aids* of the ſpirit, we indeed can do nothing; but then theſe are aids that are received already: You may call them *common grace*, if you pleaſe. And it is an error and a fault to ſay, that with

theſe

theſe we can do nothing: With them we become ſubjects capable of *moral* actions, and by them are enabled to do all that *at preſent* we are required to do, whether it amounts to what ſome call the work of real and thorough ſanctification or no. But then,

[3.] There is a work of the ſpirit that *follows after* our part; which is neceſſary at leaſt, to *compleat* and *finiſh* our ſanctification. And it is what the apoſtle may mean, when he prays for the *Theſſalonians*, 1 *Theſ.* v. 23. *The very God of peace ſanctify you* wholly: *And I pray God your* whole *ſpirit, ſoul and body, be preſerved blameleſs unto the coming of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt.* Theſe aſſiſtances are various, and many times myſterious, ſuited, like the recipe's of a doctor, to the different diſtempers of different patients, or to the different ſtates of the ſame patient. So that in this ſenſe, *as the wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, and whether it goeth: ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit*, John iii. 8. His ways are often in the deep waters, and full of intricate mazes and windings unſearchable by us.

What chiefly concerns us here, is not to be anxiouſly careful about, or diſtruſtful of his part, *but in all things by prayer and ſupplication, with thankſgiving*, for what is already done, *to make known our requeſt unto God.* —— But it greatly behoves us to be well perſuaded of theſe two points. 1*ſt*. That (with reſpect to theſe *further* aſſiſtances) our part is (according to the eſtabliſhed rule of the goſpel) to lead the way. We ſhould have a care of deceiving our ſelves, by imagining that we can do nothing, after all that the ſpirit hath already done, till theſe ſubſequent

ſequent aſſiſtances come alſo. There is a previous influence that we may and do quench, ſuch as is ſufficient to excite us to action, and would prevail, was it duly attended to and improved. As for that further work of the Spirit, it is reſerved as a bleſſing to crown all, and is deſign'd as the reward and recompence of our virtuous endeavours. The diligent hand leading the way, ſhall (with this further bleſſing) make the ſoul rich. 2*dly*. It behoves us to be verily perſuaded, that there is a ſure and certain connection between our diligent endeavours, and this crowning or finiſhing aſſiſtance, a connection in point of *promiſe* and *right*, though not always in point of *time*. Luke xi. 9——13. *Ask and it ſhall be given you*, &c.

To illuſtrate this matter by the ſimilitude of an huſbandman.

Should it be ſaid, That it is not in his *power* to plow and ſow without God's help; it is true: But then, neither is it his *duty* to do it, without this help. Therefore God hath helped him to *powers* to plow and ſow, and hath taught him ſkill; has helped him to ſoil and grain, and hath given them a ſuitable virtue to encourage his diligence. The help that he immediately needs, is help that he has received, and that attends him, to excite his induſtry. This previous, this concomitant help is what he needs and has. And as to the ſun, and rain, and ſeaſons, they are to crown and reward his diligence; to follow after, and not to go before it. To expect theſe antecedent to his own part, is to expect them before they are wanted, and before they are promiſed; and is only the language of ſloth to excuſe his diligence. Theſe were never deſigned to pluck the ſluggard out of his bed,

to

to harneſs his horſes, to drag him into the field, and to force him to plow and ſow. As the former aſſiſtances were afforded to *enable* him, ſo thoſe are promiſed to *encourage* him to do his part. But it is preſumption, and highly provoking for him to lay the fault upon God, that he has not a crop for want of due ſun, and rain, and ſeaſons, when he has ſown nothing. The bleſſing of the heavens is to recompenſe his *labour*, by a plentiful harveſt. Thus, would we reap before we ſow? Is it not enough, that what a man ſoweth, that he ſhall alſo reap, with abundant encreaſe. *Behold, the huſbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receiveth the early and latter rain:* And ſo muſt we.

[4.] We muſt diſtinguiſh between the help that is neceſſary to the *being* of ſanctification (if I may ſo expreſs it) and the help that is neceſſary to the *well-being* of it. Say, that it is poſſible that a perſon, by an early, vigorous and conſtant application of his faculties to the goſpel remedy, may attain to holineſs, without any further aſſiſtances and aids of the ſpirit (as it muſt be poſſible, if he be obliged to be holy by that alone;) yet theſe further aſſiſtances may be needful to make our ſanctification more *eaſy*, more *ſpeedy*, and more *compleat*.

Thus, was it poſſible that the ſcholar could get the knowledge of any tongue or ſcience by the bare ſtudy of thoſe written rules and inſtructions, which his maſter has laid before him (as it muſt be poſſible, if it be a duty:) Tho' this ſhould be attainable by an extraordinary and early application and diligence; yet further aids may be neceſſary to make his acquirements more delightful, expeditious and perfect.

Therefore, that the Spirit might demonſtrate his pity and compaſſion to us, who have loſt ſo many opportunities, are ſo prone to tire and to divert unto things of leſs neceſſity; he is willing, over and above the helps already provided, to meet the ſinner at his ſeveral ſchools, and there, by methods ſuitable to his own and our natures, to facilitate and haſten, and promote the work; that his ways may be ways of pleaſantneſs. Lets and hindrances ſhall be kindly removed; divine and ſuitable truths brought ſooner in our way, and the objects continued longer in our view: He ſhall find means, at the beſt time, to bring to our remembrance what we formerly knew, and to ſet revealed truths in ſuch a rangement before us; (whether mediately or immediately, whether by inſtruments or without them) that we ſhall ſee in them, as thus ſcituated and related, more of their divine ſenſe, excellency, importance and attainableneſs, and of our intereſt in them, than otherwiſe (conſidering, at leaſt, our paſts neglects, and preſent remains of partiality and ſloth) we ſhould do: Thus teaching us the art of redeeming our loſt time, and abuſed talents; and ſince we are willing at laſt, to take Chriſt's yoke upon us, and to learn of him, he is ready to make this yoke of diſcipline and doctrine comparatively eaſy, and its burthen light.

But as to any further help, that argues the aſſiſtance to be another goſpel, communicating ſuch truths as the written goſpel doth not contain; or better evidences of their reality than the miracles with which the goſpel in our bibles is atteſted, give; that is only to be felt, but not to be expreſſed; or that lies in blind impulſes, that can ſhew nothing but a warm imagi-

imagination for their divine original: Such help, I queſtion very much, whether it is either to be expected, or deſirable; or whether the placing our ſanctification in operations of this kind, does not tend to leave us in eternal doubts, whether we be ſanctified or no; does not tempt us to deſpiſe the great changes wrought by the word of the Spirit, and to lay too great a ſtreſs upon deluſive, enthuſiaſtical impreſſions; upon the peculiar manner in which certain truths are brought to our remembrance, more than in the reaſonable belief and love of them, and the ſanctifying effect they have upon our hearts and lives. When the help, we pretend we ſtill want, is made to diſparage the help we have received, and tempts us to trifle with the aids that are communicated, or to deſpair of what we conceit is further needful; by the fruits we may know it: As it ſeems an enemy to holineſs, ſo it is not likely to be that help that the holy Spirit hath promiſed.

So much for the firſt queſtion, whether further help be needful to render the *rule*, the *example* and *call* of Chriſt effectual to our ſanctification.

SECT. III.

THE ſecond query was this, Whether, if further help be needful, what that *ſincerity* in ſeeking is, to which this remaining help is promiſed?

And here there are two extremes.

1*ſt*. Some place this ſincerity in a *meer inclination* to ſeek, in the convictions and velleities

of their conſcience or heart, though theſe have no determining and ruling influence over their wills. Deſires they have, but they are irreſolute and ineffectual. The rod and the word do meet with them now and then, and do bring their duty and their real intereſt within their actual view: Theſe impreſſions kindle ſome weak concern for their allegiance, and feeble regards to their future happineſs. But the light is painful and againſt their wills, what it winks upon and runs from: It is not her *choſen rule*, for to regulate her purpoſes, to regulate her actions by. Her powers are in a different, in a contrary intereſt, and ſhe is deſirous they ſhould continue ſo: After all ſhe conſults with fleſh and blood. This ſtate of things may make their way of tranſgreſſing hard, and imbitter the deceitful ſweets of ſin; but yet ſuch are, by choice and obedience to their luſts, tranſgreſſors ſtill; and the end is death.

2*dly*. Others place this ſincerity of ſeeking in *perfection*; not in *real practical reſolutions* and *actual endeavours*, but in the *moſt vigorous degrees* of ſuch reſolutions and endeavours. They meaſure their ſincerity in ſeeking by what the faculty and active powers are capable of. What comes ſhort of all that they *can do*, they account hypocriſy, a doing nothing. All labour in ſeeking, that is conſiſtent with the health and vigour of their faculties, they are ready to account lazineſs, to be ſuch ſeeking as will leave them ſhort of any right unto the Spirit's aid, and the promiſed inheritance. Nothing is done to purpoſe with them, where the powers are not *exhauſted* or *enfeebled*.

Or at leaſt the utmoſt intenſeneſs and application, that is conſiſtent with their healthful ſtate

ſtate and continued vigour, this they lay down not only as a duty, but as a duty of indiſpenſible neceſſity to any acceptable ſincerity; forgetting that in this ſenſe it is *doubtful* at leaſt, whether *Paul* himſelf had attained, or were already perfect: He ſeems to be only preſſing after it, by ſetting more frequently and fully before his ſoul the prize and hope of his calling; forgeting that if their ſincerity be not meaſured by *real choice* and *diligent application* to the various ordinances and reſorts of the Spirit, where he has promiſed to meet and help them; (which are the genuine and evident marks of *prevalency*) but by the *degrees* of prevalency; forgetting (I ſay) that upon this principle the ſouls of the beſt ſaints upon earth muſt be at perpetual uncertainties, whether they be ſincere or no; nay, muſt have really ground of ſuſpicion that they are not ſincere: And after all, inſtead of attaining to a full aſſurance of hope, muſt be left to the tumultuous waves of diſtracting fears, or deſpair; and be forced at laſt to fly to the dark and diſmal refuge of the *uncovenanted* mercies of God, in a caſe where their all, their eternal all is immediately concerned. I might add further, were they ſure of ſuch a ſort of ſincerity in their ſeeking to day, they could not be ſure it were in this ſenſe the ſame to morrow, unleſs they could by inſtinct or infallible inſpection into themſelves know, that their powers of reſolution and activity are not now encreaſed, and capable of greater vigour; of a greater fulneſs of conſent, or ſtretch of endeavours, than before. Nay, I queſtion very much, whether ſatan can produce any ſincere ſubject amongſt all his willing vaſſals and captivated ſlaves, if none were ſincere in his

ſervice,

ſervice, but upon ſuppoſition of the like degrees of ſincerity. Whoſe conſcience is there, that can juſtly upbraid him, in the midſt of all his yieldings to divers luſts and pleaſures, that his guilty indulgencies were to the *utmoſt degree* of the faculty and active power? Or, who that has roſe up early, ſate up late, and has eaten the bread of carefulneſs for this world, can ſay he has done his very *utmoſt* in early riſings, late watchings, and careful endeavours? And therefore that he hath uſed that diligence to which the divine bleſſing is promiſed? *Sincerity* is a very intelligible thing, and to be known by the meaneſt capacity, as far as it relates to his own perſonal conduct, if a real *prevalency* of choice and endeavours be made its meaſure: But becomes a chimæra and an unintelligible conceit, without a new revelation to fix its bounds, when you make the *utmoſt degree* its ſtandard. Whereas, *If thou incline thine ear unto wiſdom, and apply thine heart unto underſtanding; yea, if thou crieſt after knowledge, and lifteſt up thy voice for underſtanding; if thou* ſeekeſt *her as* ſilver, *and* ſearcheſt *for her as for* hid treaſure; *then thou ſhalt underſtand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wiſdom, and out of his mouth cometh knowledge and underſtanding; he layeth up ſound wiſdom for the righteous, he is a buckler unto them that walk uprightly,* [So that *ſuch ſeekers* are *righteous* and *upright.*] *He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preſerveth the way of his ſaints.* [So that they are his *ſaints* alſo.] *Then ſhalt thou underſtand righteouſneſs and judgment and equity, yea, every good path,* Prov. ii. 2.—9.

To

To conclude this topick: It is, doubtleſs, very wrong for any to make the doctrine of grace, or of the ſpirit's aſſiſtance their carnal diverſion. Some, they are ready to treat ſuch as little better than mad or phrantick, who talk in this language. But then I am ſorry, on the other hand, there is any cauſe to ſay, that others who ſeem to depend upon his gracious aids, have in any degree given occaſion and an umbrage to ſuch ſcoffers: Whilſt they affect to place the Spirit's aſſiſtance in ſomething that is wholly immediate and ſupernatural; in ſomething that none, perhaps, can ſay they have ever felt; or if they had, can't give any idea of it unto thoſe that need it as much as they; or any proof that ſuch aid was from the Spirit of God any more than from a ſpirit of deluſion, for want of the atteſtation of miracles to ſhew its divine original and deſcent; or elſe they make it to be ſuch an *arbitrary*, *precarious* thing, that while our eternal all depends upon this ſpiritual aid, they will have no *poſſible way* preſcribed for the ſinner to obtain it; at the ſame time as they repreſent it as the ſinner's *fault*, that he does not enjoy the *benefit*. They make the Spirit to deny, merely in a way of *ſovereignty*, thoſe green paſtures and ſtill waters, without which it is impoſſible for the ſoul to grow fat and flouriſhing; and yet leave the intire blame upon our *perſonal* neglect, that we fall ſhort of them: Thus making God to require brick without either *ſtraw* or *clay*, or a *poſſibility* of coming at 'em, and yet to be as angry with his creatures that they do not fulfil their taſk, as if they really had, or might have had both; thus dreſſing up the beſt of Beings as an harder maſter

maſter than *Pharaoh* was to the *Iſraelites*; who, notwithſtanding, for his cruelty and oppreſſion, was by God himſelf made an example to all the tyrants of the whole earth.

I am, Sir,

Yours, &c.

S. F.

AN

ESSAY

CONCERNING

PRESCIENCE.

LETTER III.

SECT. I.

SIR,

THE buſineſs of this letter, as you will eaſily obſerve, is to give a more general view of the *nature* and *importance* of the point in controverſy; and withal to remove ſuch *popular objections*, as are apt to ariſe in the mind againſt a *thorough* and *more publick* examination of the ſubject before us.

Your reaſons againſt the publication of theſe thoughts I perfectly remember. But may it not deſerve to be conſidered, whether thoſe arguments would not conclude as ſtrong againſt the firſt plantation of the goſpel, or our reforma-

tion from popery? It was ever thought an honour to contend for theſe againſt another ſort of oppoſition than my well-deſign'd, if miſtaken, opinion is like to meet with. I only plead that the divine *mind* knows no more of the *actions* and *fates* of an *unmade* world, than the divine *will* has decreed concerning them: And that the *fall*, with all the *ſinful* and *miſerable* effects of it, was no object of God's *eternal* and *decretive* will. If there be nothing in the harſhneſs of the oppoſite doctrine, that is threatning in its conſequences, one would think there ſhould be much leſs in my way of thinking, either to perplex the minds of weak chriſtians, or to kindle freſh contentions in the churches. All God's *moral* perfections put on another ſort of luſtre, if the received notion of his *abſolute decree* or *eternal foreknowledge* of the creature's *ſin* and *miſery* be an error; but which of them receive any revenues of glory from the bare ſuppoſition of their truth?

It is a mighty ſatisfaction to me to conſider, that your inmoſt thoughts muſt be certainly with me in the *great end* I aim at, *viz.* to *guard* and to *aggrandize* the *holineſs* and *love* of God; whether you can come into the particular method, by which I may endeavour to ſecure and diſplay the glory of theſe moſt amiable attributes, or no. I have no other view in publiſhing theſe ſheets, but to clear (as I am able) the pureſt and the beſt of Beings from being the firſt and the chief cauſe of all the impurities and miſeries, that either are, have been, or ever will be in the world.

I cannot as yet conceive, that the goſpel of glad-tydings we have a commiſſion to preach unto *every creature under heaven*, contains no more glad-tydings than this, unto the far greater

part

pire of them: *God has been so sovereign as to decree that you shall want a Saviour, but not so gracious as to decree you may have a Saviour: Nay, has decreed that it shall be as impossible as it is to reverse his decrees, for you to obtain his saving help.* When we are press'd with such like difficulties as these, I know the usual reply; we tell men (you'll say) God only decrees to *permit*, or he only infallibly *foreknows* these things before all worlds. But it is, in my opinion, but a poor apology to talk thus: Since after the doublings are unfolded, and the paint wash'd off, the idea is the same, and carries in it as great a certainty, infallibility, and necessity, that such sinful and hideous events should be, as the most absolute and peremptory decree whatsoever.

I know your tenderness for the reformation, and for the honour of our excellent reformers. They, you'll say, were of a different sentiment in these respects; and you would by no means stain their memory by a departure from what they so generally receiv'd for truth.

But we ought not to forget, that there is a wide difference between the *principles* of the *reformation*, and any *particular doctrine* of the *reformers?* The glory of that day, I apprehend, lay chiefly here; in daring to think for themselves, and to speak what they thought; and upon mature deliberation to reform from their own errors, and from the errors of the nations about them, in defiance of all the terrors of this world. That which will eternize their names, is, that they had the honesty and resolution, in the face of the greatest danger, to give an account of their inmost thoughts concerning the controverted points of christendom, according to the new light they had received. As *lovers*

of *truth*, and not as *worſhipers* of their *own*, or *other* mens *opinions*, they had the ſelf-denying, heroick zeal, in contempt of reproach and ſufferings, to own a change of their ſentiments, when they had (as they thought) diſcovered a ſufficient ground for it. *Though bonds and afflictions might abide them; yet none of theſe things moved them, neither counted they their lives dear unto themſelves, ſo that they might, with* Paul, *finiſh their courſe with joy, and the miniſtry which they had received of the Lord Jeſus, to teſtify the* goſpel *of the* grace *of God*; Acts xx. 24. With an unbiaſs'd indifferency they dared to follow truth, whitherſoever they thought ſhe led them. Had they been ſo *vain*, as to have fancied *infallibility* in themſelves, or others *already*; or ſo *diſingenuous* as to have diſſembled their *miſtakes* for fear of injuring their perſons, or blemiſhing their reputation, we had never heard of that glorious deliverance from papal darkneſs. To me, it is to betray, and not to defend the *reformation*, to make it a fault to carry it farther on; or, to ſuppoſe, that what our worthy anceſtors gain'd and eſtabliſh'd by diligent reſearches, is to be maintain'd and propagated by a blind, implicit belief of all that they have ſaid, or by a cenſorious reflection upon any, who ſhall have the courage to contradict them. We then tender the honour of that great work in the beſt ſenſe, when we are tender of the *excellent principles* that brought it on, *viz. A ſuppoſition that their fore-fathers were not infallible, and that they had a right for themſelves to re-examine what others had embraced, and to reject what appeared upon ſuch inquiry to be too haſtily believed.*

Is it not ſomething ſtrange, that the devil, who ſowed ſo many tares at the firſt plantation

of

of the goſpel, ſhould ſcatter never a tare at the reformation? As the wiſdom of our reformers did not lie in thinking themſelves wiſer than all before them; ſo neither in thinking themſelves too fooliſh to diſcover, in any inſtance, the folly of others, or to improve upon their wiſdom. *Difficile eſt invenire, facile eſt inventis addere*, is an old and true ſaying.

I never met with the divine yet, who could make any thing better than *nonſenſe* or a *contradiction* of a thing's being both *fixed*, and yet *free* at the ſame time. What is this, but in other words to affirm, that either *fixed* and *free*, are one and the ſame thing; or, that the ſame thing may be both *fixed* and *not fixed*, *free* and *not free*?

As to the point of a *perſonal* and *eternal reprobation*; though it be, I doubt not, what a good man may *believe* to be true, yet it is (one would think) what none but a perſon of a *reprobate* mind could *wiſh* to be true. Sure I am, that the truths of the reformation would have been never the leſs ſanctifying or glorious, had our firſt reformers, or their followers, never ſaid or believed a ſyllable about the ſovereign cruelty of the beſt of beings, or of an eternal and abſolute predamnation. Do any in their conſcience believe, that the doctrine of *reprobation* was ever bleſſed to the ſtrengthning men's *faith* in God, or to the promoting goſpel *holineſs*? And yet, perhaps, it will not be ſo eaſy to maintain an *eternal foreknowledge* of their *damnation*, without ſuppoſing an *eternal decree* of *reprobation*.

Say, that our pious anceſtors, at the firſt dawnings of the reformation out of palpable darkneſs, uncauteloufly tranſmitted ſome *poiſon*,

and that the decree before us is an inſtance of it; however, we ought to remember, they have as ſtudiouſly convey'd the *antidote* to expel it, in that they ever ſtrenuouſly aſſerted, that both angels and man, in the day of their *grand trial*, were fairly left to the *freedom* of their *own wills*. And it was, doubtleſs, of unſpeakable more conſequence with them, that we ſhould firmly believe it, than that the decrees or foreknowledge of God ſhould be ever ſtretched to the ſubverſion of that freedom, which is, (as I take it) the only real baſis whereupon all moral government depends, whether humane or divine.

Would we not do well to conſider, whether (as ſome men manage theſe doctrines) it be not to transfer the guilt of the creature unto the Creator; and ſo to throw down the great things our reformers had *at heart*, to build up, and to unhinge the faith of the people of God, filling their heads not only with *needleſs*, but with *dangerous* ſcruples; eſpecially whilſt they are made to believe, it is a greater crime to deny ſome *ſpeculative* conceit about the divine *decrees* and *foreknowledge*, than to *eclypſe* the divine *love*, or to *ſtain* his *purity*.

However, ſhall any be afraid to vindicate the Father of all ſpirits, the Father of mercies, and the kindeſt of beings, from the moſt unnatural and vileſt imputations, leſt another ſhould call it blaſpemy, impious blaſphemy. Whilſt ſuch are guarding againſt what they falſely call the blaſphemy of *Socinus*, they would do well to have a care of the atheiſm of *Spinoza*; "That "the liberty or freedom of the will conſiſts in "an indifference to this or that. This maxim, "ſays a certain correſpondent, your adverſa-

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" ries abſolutely deny, and it appears to them " manifeſtly falſe, ſince no ſuch indifference, " they think, *is* or *can* be found in a rational " agent, finite or infinite." *i. e.* All things are *abſolutely neceſſary*, and what were ever beyond the power of the creature, or of the Creator either to prevent or alter. And ſo ſays Mr. *Hobbs*; " Thus you ſee (ſays he) how the inconveniences, " which his lordſhip objecteth, muſt follow upon " the holding of *neceſſity*, are avoided, and the " *neceſſity it ſelf demonſtratively proved.*" *Vid.* His treatiſe of liberty and neceſſity, *p.* 79. But ſuch gentlemen cannot take it ill, if ſober plain chriſtians, who cannot eaſily, perhaps, not at all unravel ſophiſtry, ſhould be ſtartled to hear any thing of this nature, that all the determinations and motions of rational agents, be they never ſo evil, are eternally and immutably fixed: A notion, that ſeems everſive (if not of the *Godhead* it ſelf, however) of the infinite *wiſdom*, *holineſs*, *juſtice*, *goodneſs* and *truth* of God; which are ſo fully, clearly and frequently aſſerted in holy writ, in the moſt ſtrong, emphatical terms, that all the wit of man can never evade their force. Nor is it to be expected, that ſerious diſſenters, who ſtedfaſtly adhere to the truths propoſed in the fourth anſwer of their catechiſm, ſhould be indifferent about thoſe delivered in the tenth and thirteenth anſwers.

Though could our nicer thoughts diſtinguiſh between God's eternal *preſcience* [or foreknowledge] of what is *future* [of what *will be*] and his *making it future* [or his being the cauſe that it *ſhall be*;] and could we, when we had done, prove (as we think) the diſtinction juſt and true; yet, ſince daily experience teaches us, that the bulk of the chriſtian world cannot, but do inſenſibly

ſenſibly ſlide into an opinion of God's *decree* of ſin, of man's *neceſſity* of ſinning, reſolving every thing into a tyrannical ſovereignty, to the infinite prejudice of the divine *lovelineſs* and *love*: Since it is ſo, it becomes us to tread over our ground again, and to examine the firſt foundations, upon which theſe enſnaring ſentiments do ſeem to ſtand.

A late author having aſſerted, that God "foreſaw (*viz.* from eternity) what would become of all his creatures," (even with regard to their ſin and miſery;) He puts this queſtion; "*But whence had he this foreſight?*" and then anſwers; "Not from any thing without himſelf; for (to ſay no more than this) then was there nothing exiſting but himſelf. Then, adds he, muſt his foreſeeing and foreknowing all things that ſhould be, reſpecting his creatures, *neceſſarily* be the reſult of his own eternal purpoſe concerning them. So that (this author goes on) there is nothing ever happens to the creature (not excepting even the creature's ſin and endleſs miſery) but fulfils ſome eternal deſign." *

But if ſuch gentlemen cannot help pleading for ſentiments, which few, if any, can tell how to reconcile to the ideas of the divine *purity* and *love*; nay, which, perhaps, they themſelves, in their cooler thoughts, do inwardly believe, are a wound and blemiſh unto them; the leaſt that can be expected in ſuch a caſe, is, that they plead too, and at the ſame time, for theſe darling attributes.

* *Vid.* A ſermon on *Pſal.* ciii. 19. intitled, *A practical diſcourſe of divine providence*, p. 10.

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Let them tell all that are about them, that the characters of God's *moral* perfections are moſt deeply imprinted upon his *works* and *word*: That heaven and earth, that every creature, and every page in our bibles, do fully witneſs to their truth. Let them tell us they deſpair of knowing any one thing, either in the books of *nature* or *revelation*, if we may not depend upon this, that God is holy and gracious, truly ſo, infinitely ſo. And that though our imperfect and obſcurer way of thinking and talking of God's abſolute perfections of being, may ſeem to gainſay, to contradict all this, yet they mean it not; they abhor the thought, it cannot be true. After all, they muſt be advocates for the goodneſs and holineſs of God; ſhould be unworthy to be the ſubjects of ſuch graces, if they had not a tongue to plead for them. Let them be very deſirous of help, and encourage every one to ſearch; that ſo every thing which diſſerves the divine amiableneſs and benignity, may (if poſſible) be cleared up, and vaniſh away.

Let them not dare to frown upon any who ſhall venture to look into, and eſpouſe ſuch a noble cauſe. What if they ſhould happen to be wrong themſelves, or judge others to be ſo; and ſhould have the courage to ſpeak what they think? We would do well to remember, it is for the *holineſs* and *love* of God; things that we our ſelves are infinitely concerned in, which it is infinitely deſirable we ſhould be capable of, and that it infinitely behoves us all to ſecure. Much leſs ſhould we combine againſt the advocates of holy love, reſolving it ſhall coſt them all that is dear in this world, ſhould they dare to plead it better, or otherwiſe than we have done; leſt we be found fighting againſt God,

and not againſt man ; for God is *light* and *love*.

Though how he can be ſo, muſt be exceeding difficult to prove, and as hard to believe, if all the wickedneſs and miſery that either *were*, *are*, or *ſhall be* in the world, be really the *birth* of God's *abſolute and eternal decrees*, or indeed the *object* of his *eternal and fixed foreknowledge* ; which *foreknowledge* muſt be either founded upon God's *immutable decrees*, or (which is as bad for the creature, though (I think) more honourable of the two, for the Creator) upon *irreſiſtable fate*.

What an horrid idea of the holieſt and beſt of Beings, muſt it give us, to ſuppoſe, that all the atheiſm and infidelity ; all the ſuperſtitions, and idolatries ; all the blaſphemies, oaths, and curſes ; all the prophanations of ſacred things, and ſacred time ; all the rebellions of ſubjects againſt their ſovereigns, and the diſobedience of children againſt their parents ; all the inhumane cruelties, deadly rage, and bloody murders ; all the wantonneſs and debaucheries, the filthy ſpeeches and lewd actions, the fornications, adulteries, inceſts and ſodomies ; all the couſenage, oppreſſions, thefts and robberies ; all the lies and ſlanders, falſe witneſſes, and perjuries ; all the luſtings, imaginations, and thoughts of the heart, which are evil, and only evil ; that theſe were all certain and fixed things before all worlds ; that both the actual fall of angels and men, with all the wickedneſſes and abominations that have appeared in the world ſince, or that ſhall break forth in all the ages to come, were, every one of them, with their ſeveral heightning aggravations, abſolutely and unalterably fixed, not by the creatures *free choice*, but *before its exiſtence* ; fixed either by

by God's unchangeable decree, or in his infallible foreknowledge, as firm and inflexible as any decree whatſoever. To ſuppoſe, I ſay, that theſe were from everlaſting, all ſure to come to paſs, by a certainty that is independent upon the creature's will or act, and that is as certain as certainty it ſelf is certain: And that for the creature to have forborn any one of ſuch villanies, or any guilty circumſtance relating to them, would have been to have vacated, to have made void a divine decree, or to have proved infallibility fallible.

And then to ſuppoſe theſe paſſive creatures, tho' put into ſuch circumſtances, as were ever out of the power of their will to prevent, or alter, and yet that would infallibly determine them to all theſe impieties and enormities; to ſuppoſe them for theſe invincible offences to be made to drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and to be tormented with fire and brimſtone, in the preſence of the holy angels, and in the preſence of the ſpotleſs lamb of love, where the ſmoke of their torments aſcendeth up for ever and ever: O what a ſtab muſt ſuch a view of things give to the divine juſtice, holineſs and love! Is there no cruelty, unholineſs, or want of generous, and righteous love in all this!

What! may we tell a damning ſwearing crew? Sirs, had you minced but one of theſe your execrable imprecations and oaths, *ſcripture* had been *falſe*, God's eternal *foreknowledge* had been *error*, a divine *decree* had been *reverſed*. And yet may we add? and without your hearty repentance for them (though ſuch repentance ſhould be as utterly impoſſible, or as

much out of your power and reach, as the forbearance of theſe your ſins were) you ſhall be puniſhed with an everlaſting deſtruction. And yet this is no more than what the principles themſelves really imply; and what ſome that hold them have been ſo ingenuous as to acknowledge. "It is (ſays Dr. *Edwards*) demonſtra-"ble from hence, that God foreknows all "things, and particularly the *commiſſion* of all "the ſins of the world from eternity, becauſe "they were pre-ordained by him." Much to the ſame effect is that paſſage of Biſhop *Davenant*'s out of St. *Auſtin*, which he quotes as his own ſenſe alſo. "If a man ſhould ſpeak to "his auditors to this purpoſe, whether ye run "or ſleep, whether you receive the word into "your hearts, or reject it, yet, in the concluſion ye ſhall *all* be ſuch as God, who is *in-*"*vincible*, has *decreed* ye *ſhould be*, as God who "is *infallible foreſaw* ye *would be*. This (adds he) "is a *moſt true* doctrine: But becauſe in the "manner of propounding it, it ſeemeth to ſe-"parate the end from the means, it is ſo moſt "true, that withal (ſays he) it is *moſt wicked*, "*unſeaſonable*, *inconvenient*; not that the ſaying "is *falſe*, but becauſe it is not wholeſomly ap-"plied to humane infirmity." * And yet this very *miſapplication* of the doctrine, though *moſt wicked*, &c. muſt (if I take him right) be, when ever it happens, as much fixed by God's invincible decree, or in his infallible foreknowledge, as the very doctrine it ſelf.

To eſtabliſh iniquity by a law is criminal; but to eſtabliſh iniquity and damnation *both* by

* Dr. *Edwards* againſt Dr. *Whitby*, p. 139. Biſhop *Davenant*'s animadverſions, &c. p. 500, 501.

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an *abſolute decree*, is (if poſſible) more ſo. The former only ſuppoſes ſin our *duty*; the latter makes our ſin and deſtruction too to be *neceſſary*. And yet an *infallible foreknowledge*, though it does not *make*, it however *ſuppoſes* an *equal neceſſity*. Now, let me appeal to any tender conſcience; does not this look like a cloud, like an eclipſe upon the divine *purity* and *love*? Could you without horror admit the thought of acting ſuch a part your ſelves? And ſhall we impute that to *infinite* purity and love, which thoſe that are but *finitely* and *imperfectly* ſo, would *juſtly abhor*? If I have all knowledge, and have not charity or holy love, I am nothing. Then what perfection or honour unto God, unto the God of light and love, can a knowledge or decree be, which is not only void, infinitely void of theſe endearing attributes, but which (to our niceſt and moſt penetrating thoughts) is ſo deſtructive to them. The objection, it muſt be allow'd, looks big and ſtrong; and, was it true, would ſeem to infer a diminution, if not an annihilation of God's holineſs, juſtice, and goodneſs. It therefore deſerves our utmoſt diligence and ſkill to abate the force, and remove the weight of it.

SECT. II.

IT is not, I freely allow, any reaſonable objection againſt the received notion of the divine preſcience or fore-knowledge, that it is *above* our *reaſon*. But then there is a wide difference between being *above* and *contrary* to *reaſon*. If revelation doth every where affirm, that the ſinful acts of the creature's will, ſo far as it is accountable, are *free*, and what the creature

might

might have prevented; it can never be true from revelation that they were *not free*, or what it *could not have prevented*. A ſinful act or action can no more be *free* and *not free* at the ſame time, than the divine Being can be *holy* and *not holy*, *God* and *not God*. Therefore whatever revelation ſays or propheſies of ſuch acts or actions, it can never amount to this, that whilſt they are *free* they are *not free*. What! to be free, and to be abſolutely determined to one ſide, and that before all worlds! To be free, and yet to be as unable to act otherwiſe as to make certain knowledge to be uncertain, or to make a true prediction falſe! Neceſſity it ſelf is not leſs free than ſuch a freedom.

But ſuppoſe I could not have fixt a plain contradiction upon the received notion of divine *preſcience*; muſt I therefore needs admit it immediately as true? I ought, indeed, to allow it *poſſible*, for any contradiction I can ſee in it; but the *reality* or *truth* of ſuch a notion muſt depend upon ſome poſitive evidence. And if the evidence againſt it be equal to that which is for it, it remains amongſt thoſe *arcana imperii*, thoſe ſecret things which belong to God, and ought not to be urged againſt the *poſſibility* of our common ſalvation; which gave the firſt occaſion to the turning my thoughts upon this ſubject. Or, if I muſt determine on one ſide, ſhould I not take the *ſafeſt*? That which is the greateſt friend to the love and the lovelineſs of God, and which affords me the greateſt arguments for holineſs? The generality of my brethren, both in city and country, that have fallen within the compaſs of my acquaintance, are, I find, eſtabliſh'd in this; that eternal fore-knowledge and eternal decrees muſt ſtand and fall together; that

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to divide them, is to deſtroy them both, or to introduce the doctrine of fate. And, indeed, I cannot, by all the application of thought I am capable of, get rid of the ſame ſentiments. So that an *eternal fore-knowledge* of ſin, conſider'd as what *will* be, has all the abſurdities of an *eternal decree* of ſin with me, and ſtains the *moral perfections* of God as much.

Whereas was it but once acknowledged, that the determinations of *free agents*, conſidered as *free*; (of which number the actual fall of apoſtate ſpirits and of our firſt parents is generally allow'd to be) that ſuch determinations, I ſay, were not the objects of a fixed and eternal fore-knowledge, then it would, by the confeſſion of all men certainly follow;

That God is *capable* of making a *free* creature, a creature with a power to chuſe or refuſe either good or evil, without being pre-determined to either by its Maker.

That thoſe who firſt ſinned, whether angels or men, were ſuch creatures.

That God did not decree from eternity that they ſhould ſin.

That neither the purpoſe of God would have been fruſtrated, nor his fore-knowledge have been made fallible, if they had ſtood.

That God abſolutely decreed from eternity to damn none.

That it was really poſſible that all the rational creation might have been everlaſtingly happy.

That God's decrees of reprobation and damnation are conditional decrees only, *viz.* in caſe of the creature's ſinning or perſiſting in ſin.

That life and death were fairly ſet before them, and that they might have choſe life and lived.

That

That God was very ſincere in his promiſes, and that the bleſſings might have been obtained.

That the truth of God's prophecies concerning *ſin* has its foundation in the fallen creature only, and not in an holy God: And that ſuch ſinful events would have come to paſs, all the ſame, from the proper and only fault of the creature, had there been no divine prophecy to have aſcertain'd them.

That man is a *moral* agent in the *nobleſt ſenſe*; and that God has given us an amazing proof of his infinite underſtanding, wiſdom, and power, in contriving, making, and governing creatures, that have by their Maker's gift, and in imitation of his own excellent nature, a principle of ſelf-determination.

And that the holineſs, juſtice, goodneſs, and veracity of God are in the higheſt degree what we conceive and muſt wiſh them to be.

All which are truths, that by the conſent of every one are certainly defenſible upon this principle, *viz.* that ſin is no object of an eternal and fixed fore-knowledge; but which at beſt are very doubtful upon the ſuppoſition of the contrary; and they are ſuch truths as we ought not by any means to detract from, nor about the honour of which can it become us to diſcover an indifferency.

The *decrees* and *fore-knowledge* of God, whatever be intended by them, were never deſign'd to deſtroy, and ought never to be urged againſt the *liberty* of the accountable creature. Thoſe attributes, when applied to God, may be in him after a different manner, and in a different ſenſe, than we find them in our ſelves. They may be given to him in a way of analogy and compariſon only. The *primary end* of ſuch aſcriptions

criptions ſhould ſtill be attended to, and if that be ſecure, it is enough.

Thus; ſay that the *fore-knowledge* of *contingent events*, ſuch as are *truly ſo*, is at any time attributed to God; the meaning may be no more than this: "That God can no more be ſurprized with any thing that happens, than a "wiſe man, that foreſees an event, can be ſurprized when it comes to paſs: Nor, can he "any more be at a loſs, what he is to do in "ſuch a caſe, than a wiſe man can, who is moſt "perfectly acquainted with all accidents which "may obſtruct his deſign, and has provided a-"gainſt them." * Again;

Is God at any time ſaid to pre-determine or fore-ordain ſuch events? The importance of theſe expreſſions may be no more than this: "That the real iſſues of all, even the moſt "contingent things, depend as much on God, "as if he had ſettled them according to a cer-"tain, eternal ſcheme and deſign, which he had "voluntarily framed in his own mind." * *i. e.* God has ſuch an infinite and preſent view of all the inmoſt thoughts, deſigns, and tranſactions of rational agents; and of what is beſt to be *ſuffered* or to be *done* by himſelf upon all poſſible emergencies, upon all the different reaſonings and reſolves of his *free creatures*; that the actual events and final concluſions of things (whatever the devices of the heart of men or devils may be) are as agreeable to the immutable laws of what is fit and meet for a God to permit to be done, or to do himſelf (ſo far as he is active therein) as if they had been abſolutely foreſeen and fixed by

* Archbiſhop *King*'s ſermon, intitled, *Divine Predeſtination and Fore-knowledge conſiſtent with the freedom*, &c.

him in his eternal counſels: Or, as if the free and ſinful agency of the creature had had no hand at all in the accompliſhment; according to that, *The wrath of man ſhall praiſe thee: the remainder of wrath ſhalt thou reſtrain*, Pſal. lxxvi. 10.

However (be this as it will) I cannot but obſerve, into how many very different *forms* and *ſhapes*, the doctrine of *univerſal decrees* hath been metamorphoſed and changed, ſince its *remoter conſequences* have been examined and purſued.

When the *decree of ſin* was ſuppoſed, by thoſe that held it, to have a *cauſal neceſſity*; then its advocates fled to the divine *ſovereignty* to juſtify them. But when they found ſuch a *ſtretch* of ſovereignty would by no means go down; then ſuch a decree as imply'd ſin to be *eventually certain* (without over-aſſerting a *cauſal influx*) was the thing they contended for. At length this *aſcertaining* of *all ſinful events* by a *decree* appear'd too ſevere to be digeſted alſo; and then we heard of a decree to *permit ſin*, underſtanding behind the curtain, not a permiſſion that ſuppoſed only the *poſſibility* of our fall, but that inferred the *actual fall* of the creature, with all the ſinful and miſerable effects that followed after it. But ſtill even this, to the *thoughtful* and *tender* chriſtian, ſeem'd to bear too hard upon the ſpotleſs holineſs, and infinite goodneſs of God; therefore the laſt refuge was to retreat to the *eternal preſcience* of ſin, giving up an *efficacious* influx or *aſcertaining* permiſſion of it as indefenſible. But ſuch a preſcience of ſin (I am perſwaded) will either oblige us to return from whence we firſt came, *viz.* to a *cauſal neceſſity* of ſin; or the *abſurdity* of ſuch a *preſcience* will compel us to part with *this* alſo.

Thus

Thus much I ſeem to be ſure of; was it duly conſidered, how ſecurely ſome retreat to God's *eternal* and *certain fore-knowledge* of ſin, as *future*, as to an impregnable fortreſs, to eſtabliſh their doctrine of God's *eternal decree* of ſin, and that *neceſſity of ſinful actions*, which is deſtructive of all religion at once; perhaps we ſhould not ſo eaſily give into that *unbounded*, and (as I take it) *groundleſs* notion of the divine *preſcience*; nor think it loſt labour to examine again into the reaſons of God's eternal fore-knowledge of a *free* event as *fix'd* and *certain*; to ſee whether this weapon may not be fairly wreſted out of their hands alſo. For ſince the Antinomians (nay, and Atheiſts too) argue ſo ſtrenuouſly from God's fore-knowledge, the *one* to a *decree* of ſin, the *other* to a *fatal neceſſity*, methinks it becomes us to examine well, whether the principle they draw ſuch ſhocking concluſions from be true. Give up an eternal fore-knowledge of ſin, as what *will be*, and they are gone: Grant them this, and you are gone, while we have the oath of God, that what he knows *will be*, is as *neceſſary* as what he decrees *ſhall be*. *The Lord of Hoſts hath ſworn, ſaying, ſurely as I have* thought, *ſo ſhall it come to paſs; and as I have* purpoſed, *ſo ſhall it ſtand*, Iſai. xiv. 24. I ſay, take away an eternal, infallible, and fixed fore-knowledge of an event confeſſedly unfixed, (ſuch as ſin is allowed by moſt to be) and you ſtab Antinomianiſm and Atheiſm both to the heart: You put it into the power of every common Chriſtian to plead effectually the cauſe of God's moral perfections, *viz.* his holineſs, his juſtice, his goodneſs and truth; and to caſt the whole and eternal blame of the creature upon the creature. But grant them that ſingle point, and they, I fear,

will eaſily triumph over all your artillery, and in ſpite of your ſtrongeſt arguments, leave upon the holy and gracious God the infinite odium of being the firſt and the principal *cauſe* of the creatures *ſin* and eternal *damnation*; or (at leaſt) run you upon a real and immutable *fatality*.

I am the more confirmed in the belief of this, not only from the reaſonings of a reputed atheiſt, * "To which I could add (ſays Mr. "*Hobbs*) if I thought it good logick, the incon- "venience of denying *neceſſity*, as that it de- "ſtroyeth both the *decrees* and the *preſcience* of "God Almighty; for whatſoever God hath "*purpoſed* to bring to paſs by man, as an inſtru- "ment, or *foreſeeth* ſhall come to paſs, a man, "if he have *liberty* from *neceſſitation*, might "*fruſtrate* and make not to come to paſs, and "God ſhould either not foreknow it, and not "decree it, or he ſhould foreknow ſuch things "*ſhall be*, as *ſhall never be*, and decree that "which ſhall never come to paſs." I am, I ſay, the more confirm'd in this belief, not only from ſuch reaſonings as theſe; but when I find ſo great a man as Mr. *Clarkſon* (in his defence of the doctrine of the divine *decrees* concerning ſin, againſt the charge of *making God the author of ſin*, of *impeaching his ſincerity*, and *taking away the* liberty *of the creature's will:*) find him *ſinking* under the weight, and flying *only* to the poor refuge of an argument *ad hominem*, by ſhewing that his adverſaries, in holding God's *eternal fore-knowledge of ſin*, are pinch'd with the ſame difficulties: Which (to me) is giving up the cauſe, and owning the objections to be *unanſwerable*.

* Mr. *Hobbs* of liberty and neceſſity, *p.* 79, 80.

That

That the reader may not be *implicit* in this point, I'll give you his very words in the Margin. *

Thus

* " 1*ſt*. They charge us with *making God the author* of " ſin : (*Tilenus* ſays, This was the reaſon that turned him off " to the *remonſtrants*.) We diſclaim and abhor it, and con- " demn thoſe who aſſert any ſuch thing. They ſay it is " the *conſequence* of our doctrine, which will have things ſo " ordered by the *decrees* and *providence* of God, that ſin is " thereby *unavoidable*. We ſay, if God be made the au- " thor of ſin on this account, their *own doctrine* is to be " charged with making him ſo, by as good a conſequence. " And ſo they muſt acknowledge that they wrong us, or " elſe condemn themſelves and their own principles.

" That they are as liable to this charge, if it be juſt, " does thus appear. He that puts men in thoſe circumſtan- " ces, wherein he *foreſees* they will *certainly* ſin, orders " things ſo, that ſin becomes *unavoidable* : But by their do- " ctrine, the Lord decrees to place men, and by his provi- " dence diſpoſes them in thoſe circumſtances, wherein he " foreſees they will *certainly* ſin ; *E. G.* The Lord foreſaw, " that if *Adam* was created *ſo* and *ſo*, and ſet in ſuch cir- " cumſtances, he would *certainly* ſin and fall by it : Yet " foreſeeing this, the Lord decreed to create him ſo, and " to diſpoſe of him in ſuch circumſtances, and actually did " it. He *foreſees*, that if *Peter* be put in thoſe circumſtan- " ces wherein he was found in the high-prieſt's hall, he " would *certainly* deny his maſter : But he decreed thus to " diſpoſe of him, and by his providence actually did it. " This, ſays *Clarkſon*, is the plain import of their doctrine " concerning a *conditional foreknowledge* in God, as will be " evident to any that underſtand it.

" 2*dly*. They ſay, we *impeach the ſincerity of God*, when " he by his word, calls ſuch as *periſh* to repentance, that " they *may be ſaved* ; and yet has decreed not to give " them repentance, but to damn them : So that it is *cer-* " *tain*, (whilſt thoſe invitations and offers are made in " the word) that they *ſhall not* repent and be ſaved. This, " they ſay, makes the word and the miniſtry of it deluſive, " and no better than *ſimulation*, making ſhow of that to ſin- " ners, which is *never intended*, and which it is *impoſſible* " they ſhould have.

" The

Thus you ſee, how little this great man has to offer, towards vindicating the *beſt* of be-

" The ground of this charge is a *certainty* that ſuch ſhall " never repent and be ſaved: But their own principles " make this *no leſs certain*: For they ſay, God *foreſees* from " eternity that ſuch will never repent, and ſo ſhall never " be ſaved: And what he *foreſees* (his foreknowledge be- " ing *certain* and *infallible*) will as certainly come to paſs, " and is as *impoſſible* not to be, as that which he *decrees*. Nay, " they ſay, that the Lord, upon his foreknowledge, that " ſuch would not repent, did decree from eternity, to damn " them, and never decreed to give them repentance, nor " any grace or aid that would *effectually* bring them to re- " pentance; no, nor any but what he *certainly* foreſaw " would be *ineffectual*. So that here alſo they muſt either " juſtify our doctrine, as to this charge, or condemn their " own.

" 3*dly*. They ſay, *We deſtroy the liberty of the will*, by " bringing it under a *neceſſity* of inclining *one way*, and not " leaving it *indifferent* to incline the other, or to ſuſpend its " acts, *&c.*

" But if this deſtroy the *liberty* of the will, their own " doctrine overthrows it. For they teach, that God, from " eternity, before any act of his will, foreſaw which way " every man's will, in ſuch and ſuch circumſtances, would " incline. He foreknows *certainly* and *infallibly*, that in " thoſe circumſtances, it will incline this way, and not the " other. Now if he knew that *certainly*, it muſt be *certain* " and of *neceſſity*: For to know that as *certain*, which is " *not certain*, is not to *know*, but to *miſtake*, to apprehend " a thing otherwiſe than it is. And if the will *might* or *could* " incline otherwiſe than he foreſaw, his foreknowledge " would not be *infallible*: For that excludes, not only *actu-* " *al error*, but a *poſſibility* of it.

" If then it be true from eternity, that the *will muſt in-* " *cline* this *one way*, it is not *indifferent* to incline *that way* " or *another*; and ſo its *indifferency*, its *freedom* from a *ne-* " *ceſſity* to incline but *this one way*, is gone by their own " principles. They muſt either grant, that the *liberty* of " man's *will* is conſiſtent with a *neceſſity* of inclining *one* " *way* and not another, or yield that their own doctrine " deſtroys its liberty." * So much for Mr. *Clarkſon*.

* Vid. *His diſcourſe of free-grace*, p. 112, &c.

ings, from the *vileſt* imputations. God muſt be the *author* of *all ſin*; be *inſincere* with his creature, and *require*, on pain of eternal death, *obedience* to his law, though he *denies a power* to obey; God muſt be all this, upon the hypotheſis of *his adverſaries*, as well as upon *his own*; *i. e.* he *anſwers* the *objections* by ſhewing they are *unanſwerable*, whether upon the foot of *abſolute decrees* or *infallible foreknowledge*. But is not this, in effect, to confeſs, that the *ſolutions* of *neither ſide* are *right*: Since (as he obſerves) "that uſes not to be accounted a rational and "conſiderate invention, which ſerves not the "turn for which it was deviſed, but runs men "into" [or leaves them in] "the ſame dif-"ficulties they ſeek to avoid." So that as ſure as God is *all* that is *good*, *upright*, and *equal*, ſo ſure we may be, that man came out of God's hands, not a *neceſſary*, but a *free* agent; and that God has not made *ſin* or *miſery*, a *fixed* and *determined* thing by any *abſolute* and *eternal decree* of his, and, by conſequence, that the *exiſtence* of *ſin*, or of *damnation*, was no object of God's *fixed* and *determined*, of his *abſolute* and *eternal foreknowledge*.

SECT. II.

AS to ſuch as ſuppoſe an abſolute, particular, eternal foreknowledge of all events, without founding it on abſolute decrees and an efficacious concourſe, in order to their accompliſhment; though (as an anonymous author takes notice) "Their opinion ſeems both more "pious, and not ſo directly deſtructive of *li-*

"*berty*;

" *berty*; yet 'tis, perhaps, equally *indefenſible*. " For this, at leaſt, is *clear*, That whatever is " thus *certainly* foreknown, muſt be foreknown " as *fixed* and *determined*. But 'tis *no leſs clear*, " that all ſuch events as depend *intirely* on the " creature's liberty (whoſe very nature conſiſts " in an *indetermination*) can have had no *fixing* " or *predetermining* cauſe. But to ſay that an " event in its very nature *indetermined*, and (by " conſequence) in its ſelf *uncertain*, is *certainly* " foreknown, is, it's humbly conceived, to af- " firm *certainty* and *uncertainty*, of the ſame ſub- " ject at once, and in the ſame ſenſe. * So " that there are (as Biſhop *Davenant* expreſſes " it) the ſame difficulties in *according* the *liberty* " of man's *free-will*, with the *infallible preſcience* " of God, which are in *according* it with the " *abſolute decrees* of predeſtination. Thoſe who " are verſed in the writings of the ancient phi- " loſophers, divines and ſchoolmen, cannot (adds " he) be ignorant of this, tho' ſuch as have con- " fined their reading or (at leaſt) their belief " to *Arminius*, *Corvinus*, and men of that " ſtamp, think, when they have founded God's " *eternal predeſtination* and *preterition* upon an " *eternal preſcience*, that they have removed all " difficulties." *p.* 333.

With reſpect to this *univerſal*, *abſolute*, *infallible*, and *eternal* FOREKNOWLEDGE of the Deity, particularly as it relates to the *ſinful*, *free* actions of the creature; it is the obſervation of the late excellent Mr. *Boyl*, " That the great- " eſt wits that have laboured to reconcile it " with the *liberty* of man's *will* have been re-

* *Vid.* An enquiry into the exiſtence and nature of God, *p.* 91.

" duced

" duced to maintain ſomething or other, that " thwarts ſome *acknowledged* TRUTH or dictate " of REASON.

The learned and the pious Mr. *Howe*, from a conſciouſneſs of the great difficulties that attend this ſubject, has wrote a fet treatiſe, with this view, *To reconcile God's eternal preſcience of the ſins of men, with the wiſdom and ſincerity of his counſels, exhortations, and whatſoever means he uſes to prevent them.* On which occaſion he has ſhewn a great compaſs of thought and accuracy of judgment, ſuppoſing God's *eternal preſcience of ſin* to be a *perfection* or *truth.* But whether he has cleared the doctrine of its juſt objections, remains a doubt.

He reckons God's *eternal preſcience* of the ſins of men *moſt certain. P. S.* p. 4. yet allows, " That God, at the ſame time, ſees that they " *might do* otherwiſe, and that if they *would* " (which, he ſuppoſes, they *could*) comply with " his methods, things would otherwiſe iſſue " with them. His *preſcience* no way (ſays he) " impoſing upon them a *neceſſity* to tranſgreſs. " For they *do it*, not becauſe God *foreknew it*, " but he only *foreknew it*, becauſe they *would do* " *ſo.*" P. 119, 120. For, " that God doth, " by an efficacious influence move and deter- " mine men to wicked actions, this (adds he) I " moſt reſolvedly deny."

But now it will (I fear) ever be an inextricable difficulty, how any thing *can* be *eternally* foreknown that it *will be*, though it was never decreed that it *ſhall be*: Or, how the *foreknowledge* it ſelf *can be* MOST CERTAIN, when the *thing foreknown*, and upon which this foreknowledge is *grounded*, is UNCERTAIN, what *may never be:* Or, how that can be foreknown to be

really *future*, that does not as yet exiſt in any ſufficient cauſe, that is determined to bring it into *actual exiſtence*; and therefore that is not properly *future* [what *will* be] but only *poſſible* [what *may* or *may not* be.] Therefore (as the anonymous author, laſt mentioned, well obſerves) "from this ſuppoſition of an eternal, abſolute "and univerſal foreknowledge, the natural and "immediate conſequence was *that* of eternal, "abſolute decrees of all actions and events as *fu-*"*ture*. For ſince this appears to be the opi-"nion of *Plato* [an heathen philoſopher] it "cannot be pretended to have taken its *original* "from ſuch expreſſions as are commonly "thought to favour it in the *New Teſtament*. "And as for the *Old Teſtament* (whatever, adds "he, the opinion of ſome of the leſs ancient "*Jews*, might be) it yields the leaſt colour in "the world for ſuch a notion. But that it [*viz.* the doctrine of *univerſal decrees*] "was admit-"ted by *Plato* as a conſequence of his do-"ctrine of an *abſolute*, *univerſal foreknowledge*, "ſeems very clear from the natural connection "between theſe two opinions. For (ſays this "author) it is ſelf evident, that whatever is "the object of an *abſolute*, *infallible*, foreknow-"ledge, muſt be ſomewhat that is *fixed* and *de-*"*termined*. But whatever event is *determined* to "*be*, muſt plainly, either be determined in its "*own nature*, or elſe it muſt be determined by "virtue of ſome *immutable order* of things, *in-*"*dependent on the Deity*; or laſtly, it muſt be ſo "determined by ſome *particular*, *divine decree*.

"That it cannot be ſo in its *own nature*, is "clear: For nothing is more manifeſt than "that every *particular event*, in *it ſelf* conſider-"ed, is *abſolutely indifferent*, either to *be*, or "*not be*. "That

" That it cannot be thus determined by vir-
" tue of any *immutable, independent order* of things
" is alike clear: For it is not only unaccount-
" able how ſuch an *immutable order* ſhould eſta-
" bliſh it ſelf *without the Deity*; but this would
" render the Creator of the world (like the *Ju-*
" *piter* of the ſtoicks, and other pagans) a ve-
" ry inſignificant being, incapable of any *free*
" action, and unable to foreknow any thing
" without conſulting the myſterious *book of*
" *fate.*

" It therefore remains, that as nothing could
" be ſufficient *eternally* to determine the *exi-*
" *ſtence* of any *particular event*, but ſome *eter-*
" *nal, abſolute decree* of that ſovereign will, on
" which all things depend; ſo nothing leſs than
" ſuch *eternal decrees* could be a ſufficient foun-
" dation of ſuch *eternal, univerſal, infallible* fore-
" knowledge, as is uſually attributed to the
" Deity." *

Biſhop *Davenant*, *Charnock*, and Dr. *Edwards*, all go the ſame way. They build God's *eternal foreknowledge* of what *will be* upon his *eternal decrees* of what *ſhall be:* And ſo make the one, to run parallel with the *other*.

Thus *Davenant*, " Now this *preſcience* [or foreknow-
" ledge] is ſo linked together with the doctrine of *predeſti-*
" *nation* [or decrees] that he who granteth or denieth
" *either*, muſt needs by conſequence grant or deny *both*."
p. 518.

So *Charnock*; " Nothing can paſs out of the rank of
" things merely *poſſible*, into the order of things *future*, be-
" fore ſome act of God's *will* hath paſſed for its *futurition*.
" As things *poſſible* could not be *known* by him, unleſs
he

* *An enquiry into the exiſtence and nature of God*, p. 194.

" he knew the *fulneſs* of his own *power*; ſo things *future* " could not be known by him, unleſs he knew the *reſolves* " of his own *will*. His knowledge of *poſſible* things muſt " run *parallel* with his *power*, and his knowledge of *future* " things muſt run *parallel* with his *will*. How comes a " thing to be knowable to God? It muſt be anſwered, " either in the *power* of God as a thing *poſſible*, or in his *will* " as a thing *future*. He firſt *willed*, and then *knew* what " he willed. Again, he ſees the *nature* of things in the " *ideas* of his own *mind*, and the *event* of things in the *de-* " *crees* of his own *will*.

N. B. " Knowledge *by the* cauſes *is the* moſt noble *and* " *perfect knowledge*, *and* moſt ſuited *to the* infinite excellency " *of the divine Being*. Since God knows all things with a " knowledge of *viſion*, becauſe he wills them, his *knowledge* " muſt be as *infallible* as his *purpoſe*. Iſai. xiv. 24. *The Lord* " *of hoſts hath ſworn, ſaying, ſurely as I have* thought, *ſo* " *ſhall it come to paſs; and as I have* purpoſed, *ſo ſhall it* " *ſtand.* *

Dr. *Edwards* is as full to the ſame purpoſe: That God's *fore-knowledge* depends on his *decrees*, is one of thoſe two propoſitions that he undertakes to prove, " Are neither falſe nor " blaſphemous, but are grounded on holy writ and right " reaſon, and are approved of by ſeveral eminent writers of " the chriſtian church, by ſchoolmen, philoſophers, and mo- " dern divines, both foreign and domeſtick." *Vid. title page.* " and there cannot be, ſays he, a more ſober and rational " propoſition than this, (*That* therefore *God* foreknows *all* " *things*, *becauſe he hath* foreordained *them*;] were it only " for this one conſideration, that God cannot *foreknow* a " thing as *future*, unleſs he hath *willed* it to be ſo. For it " muſt be owned that every *finite* thing is in its *own nature* " merely *poſſible*, not *future*; becauſe if things, and their " *events* and *iſſues* be *future* of their *own nature*, then it " would follow that they are by *neceſſity*, and that their *ex-* " *iſtence is neceſſary*, which is the property only of the Deity. " And moreover there could be no *free actions* of men; for " if they come to paſs by the *neceſſity* of their nature, the *li-* " *berty* of them is loſt. So then the argument is good and " valid, God knows all the events that ſhall happen, *i. e.* " he knows them as *future*; and the knowing them as ſuch " implies that he has decreed them —— His knowledge (the

* Charnock *of the Divine Attributes*, p. 291, 293, 302, 304, 305, 309, 310.

" Doctor

Now the caſe ſtanding thus, we muſt (for ought I ſee) either come over to the *diſmal concluſion* (as Mr. *Howe juſtly* calls it) of God's concurring by a *determinative* influence unto *wicked actions*; or hold, that it is impoſſible, *in the nature of the thing*, God ſhould *eternally foreknow* the ſinful actions of men, *viz.* not only that they *may be*, but that they *ſhall*, or *will be*. Since their *futurition* is in this ſtate a mere *contingency*, and depends *wholly* on the *as yet uncertain will* of the *ſubordinate* agent, and is not *determin'd* by the *ſupreme*.

Let us but ſuppoſe, that God made the rational creation *free*, *really free*, with a *power* of determining *either way*, without the *previous determination* of any other being, whether *creature* or *Creator*: (*without which power of ſelf-determination*, all *religious* nature and *moral* acts in the

" Doctor goes on) could not be *certain* and *infallible* without " this. For to be *certain* and *infallible*, it muſt penetrate " *into* and have a perfect ſight *of* ſome *certain* reaſon, why " the thing ſhall be *future*. Now it is impoſſible to imagine " any other thing to be the *certain* reaſon of this *futurity*, " but the *will* and decree of God from eternity: And con- " ſequently the *fore-knowledge* of God *neceſſarily ſuppoſes* his " *will* and *decree*." *

To theſe authorities I might add that of Mr. *Neſs*'s, in his antidote againſt Arminianiſm. There he tells us, that God's " Preſcience or fore-knowledge of things that [*may*] come " to paſs doth go *before* the *decree*;——But the fore-know- " ledge of things that [*ſhall*] come to paſs, muſt *follow* the " *decree*. For things muſt *firſt* be decreed, and then fore- " ſeen in that being, which they have in the decree, *p.* 10. " So *p.* 65. The Arminians *eternal preſcience* infers as abſolute " a *certainty* and *neceſſity* of *events* as our *predeſtination* doth. " For things muſt be *foreordained* to be, before they can be " *foreſeen* that they *ſhall* be." And yet this treatiſe, he tells us in his preface, was publiſh'd with the *unanimous* approbation of Dr. *J. Owen*, Mr. *N. Lockier*, and Mr. *G. Griffith*.

* Dr. Edwards *againſt* Dr. Whitby, *p.* 138, 139.

crea-

creature ſeem to vaniſh) Let us ſuppoſe but this; and then it would be *error* and not *knowledge*, to know that it is *not free*. It would be all one as for God to know *his creature* is *not his creature*, or is quite *another creature* than he *deſign'd* or *made* him to be. It would be as great an error, as to know, that what he deſign'd ſhould be a *fiſh*, will yet not be a *fiſh* but a *ſtone*. Let us but ſuppoſe, that the *accountable* will is an *undetermined principle*, till it determines *for it ſelf*; and then it would be *error*, and *not knowledge*, to know that it was determined *by another*, and that from eternity. That which was fixed before the creature had a being, could never be fixed by the creature; that which was *certain*, *infallibly* certain, before the creature's exiſtence, was not made certain by any *act* of the creature, much leſs by any *free act*, and leaſt of all by any *faulty* act of his.

For God to *foreknow*, that the creature he is *about* to make, not only *may* but *will* ſin, is to know that he *deſigns* to make it ſuch a creature, as not only *may* but *ſhall* ſin: And that either it was the *will of God* that it *ſhould* ſin, or *out* of his *power* to prevent its ſin.

If *Adam*'s *freedom* did lie in *indeterminateneſs*, till he had *determin'd* for *himſelf*; then for God to know from all eternity, that his *will* was *determin'd* to *one ſide*, and that the wrong ſide too, before it had *formally* or *virtually* determined for it ſelf, was to know, that *Adam*'s *will* was both *free*, and *not free*; *undetermin'd*, and yet *determin'd*: And ſeems to be all one, as to know a *ſquare* to be a *circle*, or a *circle* to be a *ſquare*; a *ſquare* and *no ſquare*, a *circle* and *no circle*.

Now, if *Adam*'s *fall* was *not known* from eternity, that it *would* be [but only that it *might* be] becauſe it was *not true* from eternity, that one

left

left to the *freedom* of his *own will*, would fall, but only that he *could* fall: Then, whatever depended *wholly* upon *Adam*'s *fall*, muſt, like his *fall*, be *unknown* too. That that *ſtands* upon an *uncertain event*, cannot be *more certain* than the *event it ſelf*; nor *known* to be ſo. It is no more a *perfection* in knowledge to know that to be *certain*, which is *really uncertain*, than it is to know that to be *uncertain*, which is *really certain*; no more than it is a perfection in divine knowledge, to *know* and *not to know*.

My drift is this; Though none will deny, that God knows all that is true, and that his knowledge of its truth is as early as the truth it ſelf; yet ſome may be unwilling to admit without a much greater proof, that any *unlovely truth* was *always true*; particularly that all the ſin and deſtruction that are found in the creature *in time*, were certain and fixed truths, and known to be ſo, before all time.

But what has been ſaid concerning the preſcience of God in a more looſe and popular way hitherto, ſhall in deference to your better judgment, be diſcuſſed with greater accuracy and exactneſs of method in the following ſheets.

SECT. III.

THE queſtion betwixt us is not, Whether all the ſins and perditions of the creature be fixed by an abſolute, eternal decree? We are agreed on both ſides to reject it, as derogatory to the holineſs and goodneſs of the divine Being.

But

But the point in diſpute is, Whether God's *eternal fore-knowledge* of what *will be*, extends beyond his *eternal decree* of what *ſhall be?* Or whether God *ever knew* that the creature he was about to make, *would* be ſinful and miſerable, though he *never purpoſed* it *ſhould be* ſo? This is what you ſeem to affirm; and what I deny.

Now that we might not loſe our ſelves in a miſt of words, and diſpute without ideas, it may not be amiſs to lead the way by an explication of ſome terms, the ſignification of which is very proper to be fixed in this debate.

TO KNOW A THING, is with me to conceive of a thing as it *is*, and not as it *is not*. This is a property which belongs to *true knowledge* in *general*, and much more to the *divine knowledge*.

What the *impreſſion* on the *wax* is unto the Seal, that is *knowledge*, as it reſpects its *object*; it is nothing but the *image* of the thing *known:* And a *perfect knowledge* is a *perfect image*. We ought not to find *that* in the *picture* which is not in the *original*. The exacter the conformity between them, the more perfect the repreſentation. To have *more* or *leſs* in the *knowledge* it ſelf than there is in the *object* known, would be ſuch another perfection of knowledge, as to take in the idea of a cube into that of a globe, or the idea of a globe into that of a cube: Or, as it would be to conceive of a quadrangle [a figure of four ſides] under the idea of a figure of five or three ſides only. To *know* a thing to be what it *is not*, is to know *nothing* to be *ſomething*.

We know *ſome things* that are *knowable*; *God* knows *all things* that are *knowable*. But as the things that we *know not*, are *infinitely more* than the things that we *know*; ſo God's *knowledge* that comprehends *all things* that are *knowable*, is *infinitely greater* than *our knowledge*. Of

Of the things that are knowable, ſome are ONLY *poſſible*, others are either *paſt*, *preſent*, or to *come*.

That is ſaid to be *only poſſible*, which either *may* or *may not* be, *i. e.* which, though not a contradiction, neither exiſteth it ſelf, nor as yet exiſteth in any fix'd or determinate cauſe. That is *future*, or *to come*, which though it doth not actually exiſt *it ſelf*; yet the *cauſe* or *cauſes* do *now exiſt*, that not only *may*, but *will* (firſt or laſt) bring it into *actual exiſtence*.

Though to know what is *only poſſible*, or what is *paſt*, *preſent*, or to *come*; though to know either of them be *knowledge*; yet to know what is *future* or *to come*, is only *fore-knowledge*. * To *foreknow* is to know that a thing that is not, *will be*. But what is *only* poſſible, *may not* be; what is paſt, *hath* been; and what is preſent, *now is*.

Therefore though God's *knowledge* be *infinite*, *i. e.* extends to all that is knowable: Yet his *fore-knowledge* is but *part* of his *knowledge*, and is, like its object, really *finite*. To ſay that his *fore-*

* "My purpoſe is not, ſays Mr. *Howe*, in treating of this affair, to move a diſpute concerning the fitneſs of the words [preſcience] or [fore-knowledge:] Or to trouble this diſcourſe with notions I underſtand not, of the *indiviſibility*, and *unſucceſſiveneſs* of eternal duration, whence it would be collected there can be no ſuch thing as *firſt* or *ſecond*, fore or after-knowledge in that duration. But be contented to ſpeak as I can underſtand, and be underſtood: That is, to call that *fore-knowledge* which is the knowledge of ſomewhat that as yet *is not*, but that *ſhall* ſometime come to paſs. For it were a meer piece of legerdemain only to *amuſe* enquirers whom one would pretend to *ſatisfy*. Or to fly to a *cloud* for refuge from the force of an argument, and avoid an occurring difficulty by the preſent relieſleſs ſhift of involving one ſelf in a greater." *p.* 4.

knowledge is as ſtrictly infinite as his *knowledge*, is all one as to ſay, that the *objects* of the divine *fore-knowledge*, or *things to come*, are as many as the *objects* of his *knowledge*, which are things *poſſible*, *paſt*, *preſent*, and *to come*. It is to confound heaven and earth, to talk non-ſenſe for God, or rather againſt him.

To know that to be *future*, which is *not future*, is all one, as to know that to be *not future*, which is *future*: It is to know that a thing *exiſteth* in its *cauſes*, and doth *not exiſt* in its *cauſes* at the ſame time: It is all one as to *know* that to be *poſſible* which is *impoſſible*; or that to be *impoſſible* which is *poſſible*: It is to know a thing otherwiſe than it is; to *be* and *not to be*; to *know* and *not to know*: It is not *knowledge* at all, much leſs any *perfection* in knowledge.

Or thus;

There was nothing before all worlds but *God himſelf*. God had nothing but himſelf to know then: And therefore there was nothing to be known before all worlds, but what was to be known *from himſelf*.

Now in God there is eternal *power* and *will*. What his power *can* do, is *poſſible* and *may* be: What his will *reſolves* to do, is *future*, and *ſhall* be. God *can* do more things than he *reſolves* to do: So that the things that *may* be, are *more* than the things that *ſhall* be. Or the things that are *poſſible*, are *more* than the things that are *future*; and, *conſequently*, the knowledge of his own *power*, or of what is *poſſible*, is greater than the knowledge of his own *will*, or of what is *future*.

As God's *eternal knowledge* of what is *poſſible*, cannot be greater than his *eternal power*, or than what he always *could do*, or *cauſe* to be *done*; ſo God's

God's *eternal fore-knowledge* of what is *future*, cannot be greater than his *eternal will*, or than what he did *always will* to *do*, or *will* to be *done*.

The *eternal fore-knowledge* of God ſtands upon his *eternal will*. He therefore FOREKNOWS *from eternity* that any thing not only *may*, but *will* exiſt in time, becauſe he WILL'D *from eternity*, not only that it *might*, but that it *ſhould* exiſt in *time*.

If it be no diſhonour to God, no reflection upon his wiſdom, his holineſs, his juſtice, or goodneſs, *not to will* from eternity that man *ſhould* fall; it can be no diſhonour *to* God, *not to know* from eternity that man *would* fall. Nay, if it be for the honour and glory of his *moral* perfections, that man ſhould be *truly free*, have a power to *ſtand* as well as *fall*, then it muſt be for his honour and glory, to *know* that man was *free*, might have ſtood as well as fallen; and no glory to know, that the unmade man *would not*, and therefore *could not ſtand but fall*.

It is to me an *impoſſibility* in the nature of things, for God to know from eternity that man *would* determine wrong, any other way than by determining for man from eternity, that he *ſhould* determine wrong. Which is to deſtroy man's *moral liberty*, and to make man's *ſin* God's own *act*. For the *power* that *determines*, is the *agent*, is the *actor*; the creature that is *determined by another*, is *acted*, is only *paſſive*. The *ſinfulneſs* of ſin lies in *chuſing wrong*, not only againſt a *law*, but againſt a *power* of *chuſing right*.

I am, Sir,

Your humble ſervant,

AN

ESSAY

CONCERNING

PRESCIENCE.

LETTER IV.

SECT. I.

SIR,

I Am ſenſible of the benefit that may be reap'd from ſuch a valuable correſpondence; and thank you much for the *ſpecimen* you have given me of your *goodneſs*, in *communicating* your thoughts ſo fully to me. I muſt own you have ſuggeſted ſeveral *material* things in your *remarks* upon my *hypotheſis*. I have (I think) obviated the chiefeſt of your objections already, in the foregoing ſheets; yet, for further ſatisfaction, I ſhall obſerve in this, not only *how far* I am ſo *happy* as to *agree with you*, but alſo in *what particulars* I cannot as yet perceive the *force* of your reaſonings, and therefore

fore am under a *neceſſity* ſtill to *differ from you.*

The *ſame thoughts*, more or leſs, will (I ſee) unavoidably *recur*; yet there may however be this advantage in it. The reader, by taking a *ſecond view* of ſuch *difficulties*, and the *ſolutions* of them, in a *new light*, will have a clearer conviction; how far my *ſcheme* is *conſiſtent with it ſelf*, and *defenſible*, whether upon the principles of *reaſon or revelation.*

1*ſt*. I can heartily agree with you, that God is an *omniſcient Being*; or (as you very well explain it) that he has the *whole compaſs of truth in his view.* And if this be all you mean by his *knowledge* being *infinite*, like *himſelf*, I have nothing to object againſt it. But if your opinion be, that the *compaſs of truth* is always of the *ſame extent*; that there is not *one thing* true in *time*, but what was *equally true* from *eternity*; and therefore that the *object* of knowledge, or *all truth*, is like God himſelf, *ever the ſame*, a *fixed* and *unalterable thing*; and by conſequence, that the *knowledge* of God, like his very *eſſence*, is all *eternal* and *invariable* too: If this be your opinion (as you ſeem to intimate) I muſt differ from you.

Some truths (I allow) are *ever the ſame* and *unchangeable.* Of this ſort are all *mathematical* or *abſtracted truths*, ſuch as the *ratio's* and *proportions* that certain qualities and numbers have to one another, *viz.* That the *three* angles of a rectilineal triangle, are equal to *two* right angles; or, that the ſquare of the hypothenuſe is equal to the ſquare of both the ſides taken together; or, (to uſe a more familiar example) that what *two* is to *four*, that *four* is to *eight*, and *eight* unto *ſixteen*, &c. The *proportion* is exactly and *ever the ſame*: And therefore

that

that the divine *knowledge* of *ſuch kind* of truths, might be *real* and *perfect knowledge*, it muſt, like the *truths themſelves*, be *ever the ſame*, and *unchangeable* alſo.

But then there are other things that are not of ſuch a fixed and inflexible nature, but admit of *various* and *innumerable mutations* and *changes*: Of this ſort are the ſeveral *modifications* of *matter*, and the *temporary* exiſtences of *creatures* and *actions*; with reſpect to which, that which is true to day, would (it may be) have been falſe the day before, and may ceaſe to be true to morrow. Now, as *ſuch truths* as theſe are ſtill *varying*, God's *knowledge* of them, that it might be *truly knowledge* (which lies in the *exactneſs* of its *conformity* to its *object*) *muſt vary* alſo.

To me, a knowledge without any variableneſs of things that are ever varying, is juſt ſuch another perfection in knowledge, as it would be to have a knowledge that is ever varying, of an object that never varies. Or, a knowledge which cannot alter, of an object which is always altering, muſt either contain *more* than its *object* at one time, or *leſs* than its *object* at another, *i. e.* muſt either be a *redundant* or *defective* knowledge; which is a manifeſt imperfection in knowledge.

I have been ever taught to believe, that God's *holineſs*, *juſtice* and *goodneſs* are as *truly infinite*, as the divine *knowledge*; and cannot but ſtartle as much at a *finite holineſs*, at a *finite juſtice* and *goodneſs*, as others do at what (I think) they miſcal a *finite underſtanding*.

Dr. *Moore*'s remark upon the platoniſts and ſchoolmen, is not wholly foreign in our preſent caſe. " They were wont, ſays he, to ſpread " out every *attribute* of God to as *infinite exceſs*

" as

" as they could; forgetting that one *neceſſary* " *meaſure* of *all his attributes*, that they be no " further *applied* to him than as they imply *per-* " *fection.*"

Whatever is *poſſible*, God *knows* to be *poſſible*; whatever is *paſt*, God *knows* to be *paſt*; whatever is *preſent*, he *knows* to be *preſent*; whatever is *future* or *to come*, he *knows* to be *future* or *to come*; whatever is *certain*, or that *cannot be otherwiſe*, he knows to be *certain*, or that it cannot be *otherwiſe*; and whatever is really *uncertain*, or truly *contingent*, he *knows* to be really *uncertain* or truly *contingent*, viz. That it *may be*, or *may not be*, or that it *may be* either *thus* or *thus*.

2*dly*. I can agree with you alſo, that the *knowledge* of God being *infinite*, or extending to the *whole compaſs of real truth*, it will follow, That he cannot but ſee things which are really *to come*, as well as thoſe which are truly *paſt*, or *preſent*. But then, as the *knowledge* of God is never the *leſs* infinite, but the *more ſo*, in that he can *ſee* nothing as *paſt*, before it *is paſt*; nor nothing as *preſent* before it *is preſent*: So I take it to be an equal perfection in the divine knowledge, that nothing is view'd by him as *future* or *to come*, before it is *truly future* or *to come*. And I perſwade my ſelf, I have you with me in the ſame ſentiments.

So that the only queſtion is, when any thing is properly of the number of ſuch things, as not only *may come*, but *are to come?* Now when any thing exiſts in ſome *certain* and *fixed cauſe*, then (I conceive) it may be ſaid to be really *future* or *to come:* But till then I reckon it amongſt the things that are *only poſſible*, but *not future*.

Though the *preſent* or *paſt exiſtence* of ſin do prove that ſin was *always poſſible*; yet nothing but

but an *eternal cauſe* of ſin can prove, that ſin was *always future*. Now if the *future* exiſtence of ſin was *not always true*; then for God to have *viewed* it as *always true*, would have been to have had from eternity, *more truths* in his *view*, than were then in the *whole compaſs of truth*, or rather to have ſeen more things to be true, than were true.

As the revealed religion is what I moſt firmly believe; ſo I can make no doubt, whether the *knowledge* of God extends unto things *to come*, though they ſhould exiſt only in the *remoteſt cauſes*. This is a truth that the *ſacred writings*, as well as the *light of nature*, abundantly teſtify. But the queſtion is, Whether it can be proved from either, that it was *certain before all worlds*, that ſin *would be*, or only that it *might be*? Becauſe, if it was not a *certain* truth, it could, I ſay, be *no imperfection* in him who had the whole compaſs of *certain truths* in his view from eternity, *not to ſee it there*. To put more truths into the knowledge of God, than there is in the object of knowledge; or to make the knowledge more certain than the object it ſelf, is to ſay, that the knowledge of God doth differ from the object, that it is not true knowledge, is really imperfect. To ſuppoſe which, is, in effect, to ſay, that ſome truths have really eſcaped the divine knowledge; which is truly to ſet bounds to the divine mind, and to confine his underſtanding.

I *ſet* no other *bounds* to the divine *knowledge* than what the *object* of divine knowledge it ſelf doth *ſet*, which is *all truth*. Now is *all truth* ſuch a *narrow*, ſuch a *very narrow object* of knowledge? But what *very narrow bounds* muſt ſome ſet to the *love* of God! whilſt they exclude ſo many millions from being the *poſſible* objects of

it; and this at a time when we must allow them to be in their own nature as *capable objects* of the divine *love* as any; they being nothing, as yet, but what they are in the divine *idea* and *purpose*; and so have no *real unloveliness*, even in *futurity*, but what their maker *designed* for them. Nay, what *narrow bounds* must these set to the divine *holiness* and *justice*, whilst they conceive of God, as being in his *eternal decree* in *love*, with so much *unloveliness*, and yet as being so *infinitely displeased* with the *unloveliness* that he *loves*. But you will say; Were not all things that are NOW *future*, ALWAYS *future*? No; no more than the things that are NOW *past*, were ALWAYS *past*; or the things that are NOW *present*, were ALWAYS *present*. And the reason is, because nothing is *properly future*, till some *sufficient cause* has *determined* that it shall be. Therefore what God cannot be the cause of himself, cannot be *truly future*, till the *creature doth exist*, and till the *cause* of its *futurity* doth *exist in the creature*; till then, it is *only possible*, it is true that it *may be*, but not true that it *shall be*. Thus,

Since the *futurition* or futurity of sin must be grounded upon the *free act* of the *creature's will*, which, in its own nature, is an *unfixed*, *undetermined* principle, till it *formally* or *virtually* determines for it self: Therefore, without losing that very *liberty* that makes it *capable* of sinning, it can never from eternity be considered as a *fixed* and *determined* principle.

It was *always true*, that sin *might* be; because it was *ever true*, that God had a power to make a creature *free*, i. e. that *might* or *might not* sin. But had it been *always true*, that sin *would* be, it must also be true, that such *cause* or *causes* did *ever* exist, which not only *could*, but *would*

bring ſin into *actual exiſtence*. But now whatever is the *cauſe* of ſin's *exiſtence*, is the *cauſe* of *ſin it ſelf*, is, indeed, the *ſinner*. To ſay therefore that it was *ever true*, that ſin *would* be, is to place the cauſe of ſin, in that which *ever was*, in the *holy God*: It is to ſay, either that God did *ever will* that ſin *ſhould* be (and who can reſiſt his will?) or that there was a *neceſſity* that ſin *ſhould be*, whether God *would* or *no*: It is to ſay, either that *ſin*, that *all ſin*, is the *effect* of God's *eternal decree*, or that it *was not in the power* of his eternal *decree* to *prevent ſin*.

But is it not an *imperfection* in God, *not to know* all that *will be*?

He does *know* all that *will be*, as ſoon as it is *true*, that it *will be*. But it was not true before all worlds, that ſin *would be*, but only that ſin *might be*. What *will be*, is *certain*, what is *certain* is *fixed*, what is *fixed* is no longer *free*, but *neceſſary*. And if it was ever true, that ſin, not only *might*, but *would* be; it was ever *certain*, it was ever *fixed*, it was ever *neceſſary*; it was ever true, that ſin *muſt be*; or it was ever *impoſſible* it ſhould *not be*: Unleſs it can be true, that a thing *will* be, and yet *will not* be, at the ſame time. Now will any one ſay, It was *ever impoſſible* that ſin ſhould *not be*; and yet that it is *poſſible* for the *creature* to *hinder* ſin from being? That it was *ever true*, that ſin *muſt be*, and yet that it *wholly* depends upon the *free* will of the creature, whether ſin *ſhall* be, or no? or, that it is the creature's *fault*, and his *only*, if the ſin, of which it was true before all worlds, that it *ſhall be*, *ſhould ever* be?

Then, Does not God know *all things*?

Yes, he does know *all things*; and therefore knows all things as they *are*, and not as they *are not*.

not. He would not know *all* things, if he knew *ſin* to *be*, what it is *not*; to be *future*, whilſt it is *only poſſible*; if he knew from eternity that ſin *would be*, when it was only true *from eternity*, that ſin *might be*. Is there no way to prove that God knows *all* things, but by ſhewing that he *does not* know *all* things? Should God know but *one thing*, otherwiſe than it is, his knowledge would be limitted; it would from that moment ceaſe to be infinite, he would *not know all things*.

But is it not an *imperfection* in the *divine knowledge* to *know* any thing *otherwiſe* in *time*, than he *knew* it from *eternity*?

The *knowledge* of *himſelf* indeed, is like *himſelf*, *invariable*. But his *knowledge* of the *creature*, that it might be *truly knowledge*, muſt *vary* as the creature *varies*. If a *globe* be turned into a *cube*, it is no *imperfection* in the divine knowledge, to know that to be *now* a *cube*, which he knew *before* to be a *globe*. To know it to be a *globe ſtill*, is not to *know*, but to *miſtake*.

Such go upon a wrong principle, that it was not *really* left to the *freedom* of the *creature's will*, whether ſin *ſhould exiſt* or *no*: But that there was a ſecret purpoſe in God, that ſin *ſhould* exiſt, either *with* or *againſt* the creature's will. Forgetting that what is *againſt* the creature's will, is not the creature's *act*, much leſs his *ſinful act*, but the *ſinfulneſs*, if any, belongs to that being, which laid this *neceſſity* upon the creature.

Such things, whoſe *future* exiſtence depends *intirely* upon a chain of *neceſſary cauſes*, were *eternally neceſſary*; and that they not only *might*, but *would* exiſt, might be known *from eternity*: But thoſe things, whoſe *future* exiſtence really

depends more or leſs upon a chain of *free cauſes*, till ſuch cauſes do *formerly* or *virtually* determine themſelves, are *only poſſible*, and can only be known *from eternity* to be *only poſſible*. If their *futurity it ſelf*, or that they *ſhall be*, has no *eternal cauſe*, but is *only* the *effect* of *time* (pardon the expreſſion) then their *futurity*, or that they *will be*, can only be known *in time*. It would be error and miſtake to know a thing to *be future*, *before* it *is future*.

3*dly*. God's glory (and particularly the glory of his *holineſs*) is (I own) the great end which he invariably purſues in the moral world, and which he cannot fail of. It is for this very reaſon I am ſo unwilling to believe, that it was true before all worlds, that ſin not only *might*, but *would be*; or that ſin did *ever exiſt* in ſome *fixed cauſe*. This to me, is to *ſtain* the divine *purity*, to *deſtroy* the *liberty* of the *creature*, and *ſtab* the divine *juſtice*; and ſo to take away thoſe perfections which are ſo neceſſary to God's governing the world with equity, and the making all events truly ſubſervient to his own *glory*.

I never apprehended, till now; nay, am yet at an utter loſs to conceive, how the *happineſs* of the bleſſed God ſhould be *leſſened*, only by ſuppoſing that none of the *unhappineſſes*, nor *moral deformities* of his reaſonable creatures were the *object* of an abſolute eternal decree. Now if theſe ſcenes of wickedneſs and miſery be not *in* the decree, they can never be known *from* the decree. And yet God's *eternal foreknowledge* is (as I take it) nothing but God's *eternal knowledge* of his own *eternal decree*.

SECT.

SECT. II.

4ibly. IT is no part of the diſpute, whether God has a *full acquaintance* with the *hearts* of men? But whether a *full acquaintance* with their *hearts* implies that God knows *more* to be *in their hearts* than their *hearts contain?* Or, whether it be knowledge to ſee that in the heart, which doth neither exiſt it ſelf there, nor yet in any fixed and certain cauſe? I can eaſily allow, that the great Creator of our ſouls, and the Father of ſpirits, ſees perfectly all their powers: But then I muſt add, that he would not *perfectly* ſee them, if the powers that are *neceſſary* were view'd as *free*, or the powers that are *free* were view'd as *neceſſary*. A *compleat knowledge* of his own creature, is, by your own acknowledgment, to ſee them as they *are*, and not as they *are not*.

I own alſo, that the divine mind did perfectly ſee before all worlds, how ſuch powers of his rational creatures *might* be imploy'd, which way they *might* incline, and how their determinations in all poſſible caſes *might* be. But it is one thing to know from eternity how a free power *may be* imploy'd, and another thing to know how it *will be* imploy'd; which way it *may* incline, and which way it *will* incline; what the determinations of ſuch a power in all poſſible caſes *may be*, and what they *will be*. The power being yet *free*, its acting either *thus* or *thus*, is *poſſible*; but whilſt it is *free*, neither ſide is *certain*, nor can be *view'd* as *certain*.

The queſtion is about ſuch actions as proceed from a *free agent* acting *freely*, with a freedom of *indifferency*; and for which therefore the creature

ture is accountable as his own acts and proper ſins: whether ſuch actions are *fixed* and *determined truths before all worlds?* And if they be *not ſo*; whether it be any *perfection* to view them as ſuch, or as within the compaſs of *fixed truths*, whilſt they remain *unfixed*.

Indeed, whether *Adam* ſhall be *created* with a *freedom of will*, and whether he ſhall be *left* to this *freedom*, depends upon the *pleaſure* of his *Maker*: but being *created* with ſuch a *freedom*, and *left* unto it, it does (in theſe circumſtances) depend upon his *own pleaſure*, whether his *freedom* ſhall be *abuſed* or *no*. But, I ſuppoſe, no one will ſay that what is the object of an eternal, infallible, and fixed fore-knowledge, does notwithſtanding *truly* depend upon the meer pleaſure and free choice of a future creature, whether it ſhall exiſt or no. Would not this be in effect to ſay, God muſt aſk his creatures leave, whether his own eternal knowledge ſhall be certain and infallible or no?

What intirely depends upon the *liberty* of man's *will*, depends, I ſay, *intirely* upon his *pleaſure*, whether it ſhall *exiſt* or *no*. But what was true *before* his *exiſtence*, that it *muſt be*, or, that it is impoſſible that it ſhould not be, (which you grant to be true of ſin, conſider'd as the object of the divine eternal preſcience) can never depend upon *your* or *my* pleaſure, whether it *ſhall* be or *no*.

You ſeem to conceive of ſin, as objected to the divine underſtanding, not only as *poſſible*, but as *future*, without a *decree*. Now, if nothing be *future*, but what exiſteth in its cauſes, (which is the principle I go upon) then if ſin was ever future, there muſt be a cauſe of ſin's futurity, before the exiſtence of any ſinner; which ſince

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it is not to be found in the *decree*, muſt (I fear) be found in *fate*. Is it not a little odd, to contend for a certain knowledge before all time, whoſe certainty is grounded upon an object, of which there is as yet no certain cauſe of its exiſtence? Does not a knowledge that claims a greater certainty than there is in the object, the ground of it, look ſo far very much like a groundleſs knowledge, or a groundleſs certainty.

Your opinion is, that God not only knew from eternity the *objective evidence*, that would come within the *power* of the creature's will to preſent unto its own underſtanding; but alſo what *uſe* the will would make of this *objective evidence*. Now there are two or three queſtions I would aſk upon this ſuppoſition: *Firſt*, If the will be *not certainly* determined to one ſide by this ſtate of things, how can this ſtate of things convey a *certain knowledge*, how it ſhall determine? *Secondly*, If it be *certainly determined* to one ſide in this ſtate of things; then ſuppoſing this ſtate of things does not depend upon the will of the creature, what becomes of its *moral liberty*? *Thirdly*, Whether you do not hold, what amounts to a *neceſſity* of determining wrong? You ſuppoſe God foreſaw, a creature thus made, not only *might*, but *would*, would certainly, infallibly range the evidence wrong, and chuſe accordingly; and yet *reſolved* to make it ſuch a creature. If the will of the creature muſt be the real, and the only cauſe of ſin; then ſince the cauſe it ſelf is contingent, determined as yet to neither ſide, and uncertain; the knowledge that wholly depends upon this contingent cauſe cannot be before all worlds certain.

5thly, We are agreed, that nothing can be

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the *object* of divine *knowledge* but *truth*. Now it is not, as I take it, a truth, that what is *really future*, is *truly contingent*; or, that what is *truly contingent*, is *really future*. What is *really future*, *muſt be* (by your own confeſſion) or *ſhall certainly be*: what is *truly contingent*, *may* or *may not be*, and it is as yet *uncertain*, whether it *will be* or *no*. So that a *future contingency* is to me all one as a *certain contingency*, or a *contingent certainty*; a *contingency* and *no contingency*, a *flat contradiction*.

Give me leave, ſir; the queſtion between us is not whether God has a *fore-knowledge* of *all* that is *future*? Nor, whether the *abſolute predictions* upon divine record be not an *evidence* of it? I grant them both. But the diſpute is, whether any thing that is *future* be *at the ſame time contingent*? Or, whether a thing can be *certain* as to its *event*, and yet *uncertain* as to *all its cauſes*? What is *future*, [will] be; what is really *contingent*, [only may] be. Now can an action be known, both that it *will* be, and that it *only may* be, at the ſame time? Can predictions prove, that things which *differ*, are yet the *ſame*? No more than they can prove [F] to be [C] or [2] to be [3.] I would obſerve,

Without the decree nothing could have been *future*, nor *known* as ſuch. This (I ſuppoſe) all will allow. Then certainly the bare *decree* can make nothing *more* to be *future*, than what is *contain'd* in it. Its *eternal* futurity can never ariſe from the *meer act* of the *unmade* creature; no more than *ſomething* can ariſe from *nothing*. For the creature, before all worlds, is *nothing*, but what it is *in* and *by* the *decree*: And therefore in this ſtate of things can give *certainty* to nothing farther than the *decree* doth go? unleſs the *effect* can exiſt *without* or *before* its *cauſe*.

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I ſeem, you ſay, to make theſe terms [future] and [contingent] to be as different, with reſpect to *God's knowledge*, as they are with regard to *ours*. Why, if our knowledge be *true knowledge*; ought it not to be ſo? Unleſs you will allow *our* knowledge to be *more perfect* than *God's*. But you'll reply, that what is *contingent* to *us*, you apprehend may be *future*, with reference to the *divine knowledge*. I grant it; ſuppoſing the thing to be *not contingent* in it ſelf, but to be *really future*, *i. e.* upon ſuppoſition that our apprehenſion of its contingency be a real miſtake. But you tell me, "I will have no-"thing to be *future*, but what is the matter of "a decree, in which you cannot concur with "me." It is my opinion, I own, that nothing can be *from eternity* future without a *decree*: Becauſe nothing can be *from eternity* future, without an *eternal cauſe* of its futurity: Which, I conceive, can be nothing, but an *eternal decree*, unleſs you fly to *fate*. If it be *true* that a thing *will* be, there muſt be *ſome cauſe* of this *truth*: And if the *truth* be *eternal*, the *cauſe* cannot be *in time*; unleſs the *effect* (as has been obſerved) can exiſt *before*, and ſo *without* its *cauſe*.

SECT. III.

6thly, YOU take me right, when you ſuppoſe me to conſider the *decree of ſin* to be only *permiſſive*; and to look upon *all ſins* as *from eternity* meer *contingencies*. But then you put the queſtion, "Why is not *virtue* a *contin-*"*gent* as well as *vice*; ſince they both equally "depend upon the *free* act of the creature?"

It muſt be ſo for ought I ſee, ſo far as God hath decreed, it ſhall be left *entirely* to the *liberty* of the creature, whether the *acts* of virtue ſhall exiſt, or no. Indeed the conſequent will be, that *rewards* and *puniſhments*, ſo far as they relate to the *free* actions of *moral agents*, are only *conditionally* decreed, in conformity to the tenour of divine *promiſes* and *threatnings*, which are certainly *conditional*. As to what you obſerve, that an *abſolute decree* ſeems to *neceſſitate* the *event*; I entirely agree with you in it. And an *abſolute will* in God (if there be any difference betwixt his *will* and *decree*) I am of opinion does the ſame. Nay, the very *fore-knowledge* of an event (if the fore-knowledge be *abſolute* and *infallible*) muſt *imply* an equal *neceſſity* alſo, though it ſhould not *cauſe* it. For ſince *God*'s fore-knowledge *truly repreſents* the object; there cannot be a greater *fixedneſs* and *infallibility* in the *repreſentation*, than there is in the *object repreſented*. For as that knowledge of an object is *true knowledge*, which repreſents the *object* as it *is*; ſo that muſt be a *perfect knowledge* of an object, which repreſents the object *perfectly* as it is. Now ſince what is *really contingent* only *may be*; and what is *really future*, not only *may be*, but *will be*: Then, as *may be* and *will be* do differ in their ideas; the knowledge that repreſents them *fully*, muſt repreſent this difference; and the more perfect the knowledge, the more perfect will this difference ſhew.

What God *infallibly foreknows* is *infallibly true*. Now can you, or I, or all the world hinder that from *being true*, which is *infallibly true*? So that the *fore-knowledge* of God *implys* a *neceſſity* ſome where, as much as his *decree*, whether it be the *cauſe* of it or no. The only queſtion is, to what muſt this neceſſity be aſcribed? Not to the *fu-*

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ture creature: For that which as yet *never was*, can never be the *cauſe* of that which *ever was*. Beſides, the creature (as has been obſerved) is *nothing* before all worlds but a *decree*. Do not you then reduce things to that *fate* and *neceſſity*, that you would ſeem to guard againſt?

7thly, I cannot perceive the conſequence, that God muſt decree, he *knows not what*, unleſs he foreſees a thing *would be*, before he decrees it. Though indeed it ſeems to follow, that the *decree* was *needleſs*, if the thing was *certain without it*. Mr. *Neſs* I take to be right and clear in this point, God's "fore-knowledge of a thing that "*may* come to paſs, does go indeed *before* the "decree; but his fore-knowledge of things that "*ſhall* come to paſs muſt *follow* the decree." Not that any time did interpoſe betwixt the *one* or the *other*; but only as in *order of nature* the knowledge of *poſſibilities* is *before* the decree, ſo the fore-knowledge of *futurities* is in *order of nature after* the decree.

I agree with you, that whenever it is *true*, that any thing *ſhall* come to paſs, God *knows* it to be *true*: And I ſuppoſe *you* will not maintain, that he *knows* it to be true, *before* it be true. What I wonder at is, that while you will not allow the future exiſtence of ſin to become *true by* the decree of creation, nor to be true *without* the decree; yet you hold it to be true *upon* the decree, *i. e.* to be true without any *cauſe* of its truth. And notwithſtanding this, God's knowledge, you ſay, finds out the *effect* by the *cauſe*, or the *cauſe* by the *effect*.

As the notion of *contingent futurities* is grounded upon the doctrine of *preſcience*, of *ſuch a preſcience*, as can foreſee that *as certain*, which depends upon *no certain cauſes*; ſo *contingent futuri-*

ties and *such a prescience* must, I believe, stand and fall together.

8*thly*, You mistake me; I do not believe *fore-knowledge* and *decrees* to be the *same thing*; but only that an *eternal fore-knowledge* of things as *future* implies an *eternal decree* of their *futurity*. A *consequential* necessity in *knowledge*, I allow; but then it must be only, where there is an *antecedent* necessity in the *object*, which such knowledge supposes: Neither can the *former* be *more infallible* and *undeceiveable* than the *latter*.

I grant the difference betwixt these two acts in God, the *understanding* and *will*; that the *former* always *supposes* the object, the *latter* doth always *produce* it. But then as the *object* the understanding *supposes*, must either be *produc'd*, or be in its *own nature necessary*: It will follow, that this proposition, *that sin* shall *be*, consider'd as an *eternal truth*, must be a truth that is either *necessary* in its *own nature*, or *produc'd* and made so by the *divine will*. For (I say again) the *creature* which yet *never was*, cannot be the *cause* of a truth that *ever was*.

That God may know that the *existing* creature *will* act wrong, and yet the *creature* be the *only cause* of it, none deny. But the question is, whether this is to be known concerning a creature that hath *no existence* of its own, but what it has *in God's decree*, without supposing the *cause* of its *acting wrong* to be contained *in the decree* as much as any *inference* is contain'd in a *proposition*.

There is, I apprehend, a wide difference between a *knowledge* grounded upon an *object* made *already*, and *by another*, and a *knowledge* drawn from an *object* I *intend* to make *my self*. The *former*, it's granted, implies *no causality* in me of what

what I *know*; the *latter*, I conceive, *does*. To know that the creature, I am *about to make*, not only *may*, but *will* sin, is to know (as has been hinted before) that I design to make it such a creature, as not only *may*, but *shall* sin; and that it was either *my will*, that it *should* sin, or out of *my power* to *prevent* its sinning. The creature, I have proved, is nothing before all worlds, but what it is in the divine purpose; now to draw the *actual fall* of the creature from the divine purpose, if it be not in his purpose, is to make that to be *his purpose*, which is *not his purpose*.

You mistake my notion, if you think it implies then, that God must ever be a *stranger* to such *events*, till the free agents themselves have *actually brought them to pass*, or have *formally resolved upon them*. I make no doubt (as will be shewn more fully anon) but God, from the thoughts that *are*, understands the thoughts that *are not*; viz. such *future thoughts* which depend as *certain effects*, upon our *present thoughts*, as *certain causes*.

I am, Sir,

Your humble servant,

S. F.

AN

ESSAY

CONCERNING

PRESCIENCE.

LETTER V.

SECT. I.

SIR,

YOUR poſtulatum, I own, to be modeſt and reaſonable, *viz.* "That an "infinite mind may have ways of "ſeeing and underſtanding things, "which we can form no conceptions of.

But the queſtion here, is, not *how* God foreſees ſin from eternity, but *whether* he foreſees it? Prove you that it *is* ſo, and I ſhall be far from rejecting it, becauſe I cannot tell *how* it is done.

Q. 1ſt. But you will ſay, Though it is a *contradiction* to *reaſon*, that the *act* of the creature's *will* ſhould be *free*, and yet ever determined

mined to *one ſide*, and known to be ſo; yet *revelation* is *above reaſon*. And does not revelation tell us, That God eternally foreknew our ſinful free actions? I anſwer;

A. As what is really a *contradiction* in a *divine revelation*, can never be *true* in *right reaſon*; ſo what is really a *contradiction* [illegible] *reaſon*, can never be *true* in a *divine revel*[illegible]. It is by *reaſon* that we know a *revelation* to be *divine*. And if ſo; the *certainty* of the *revelation* can never exceed the *certainty* there is in *reaſon*. To *depreciate* and undervalue *right reaſon*, is to *depreciate* and undervalue *revelation it ſelf*. To *reject* the *one* is to reject the *other*; and is all one as to ſay, we believe revelation without a reaſon to believe it; or, that it is not reaſonable to believe a revelation. That a contradiction cannot be true, is a principle of right reaſon; and if it be not a principle of revelation too, nothing in revelation can be true; or it may be both *true* and *not true* at the ſame time.

Q. 2*dly*. What, you will ſay, can be more free than thought? And yet (ſays the pſalmiſt, *Thou underſtandeſt my thought afar off*, Pſal. cxxxix. 2. Now if God knows our thoughts afar off, or a long time before they are; why not from eternity? I anſwer;

A *free* thought is a thought that *might never have been*. Therefore,

A. 1. To anſwer your purpoſe, God muſt not only know my thoughts a long time before they are, but even before I have done any thing, that will certainly produce them, *i. e.* God muſt know that they are *my* thoughts before they really are ſo, either by any *actual exiſtence* of their own, or by their exiſting in my heart, in their *remoteſt cauſes*: Or, thus; God muſt

must know that they are *my* thoughts, before it is certain they *will be mine*; nay, while it is true, they *may never be mine*. But ſure, for God to underſtand my thoughts afar off, can never mean, that he underſtands a thought to be *mine*, *before it is mine*, or while it is as much *another man's* thought as *mine*, and may eventually be *another's*, and not *my own*.

2. Some make the phraſe, *afar off*, to deſcribe the *quality* of *David*'s thoughts. Thus; Though my thoughts be afar off, be never ſo foreign, and diſtant from one another, be never ſo diſconcerted to appearance; yet thou doſt underſtand the chain of them, and canſt make out the connection. Or,

3. *Afar off* here, may relate to *place*, and not to *time*. God is ſaid to dwell in heaven, in the high and the holy place, becauſe the glory of his Majeſty is chiefly diſplay'd there. But he is not ſo in heaven, as to be abſent from this world, or to be unacquainted with the moſt ſecret tranſactions here; that any ſhould be tempted to ſay, He hideth his face, he will never ſee it. No, *The Lord looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the ſons of men. From the place of his habitation he looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He conſidereth all their works*, Pſal. xxxiii. 13, 14, 15. Though he is in this ſenſe *afar off*, yet he underſtands our *very thoughts*. And the context favours the explication. For *David* is all along admiring, not God's *eternal foreknowledge* of what *David*'s actions and his purpoſes would *hereafter be*, but God's ſtupendous and perfect *knowledge* of what they *then was*. *Thou knoweſt my down ſitting, and mine up riſing; thou compaſſeſt my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways: For there is not a*

word

word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knoweſt it altogether; Thou haſt beſet me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge (viz. of what I *now am*, and not ſo much of what I *ſhall be*) *is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.* Thou underſtandeſt *afar off* [even *from the higheſt heavens*] my inmoſt thoughts—*If I ſay, ſurely the darkneſs ſhall cover me; even the night ſhall be light about me. Yea, the darkneſs hideth not from thee; but the night ſhineth as the day: The darkneſs and the light are both alike to thee. For thou haſt poſſeſſed my reins.* And that which corroborates this ſenſe of the words, is, the thought God underſtands afar off, *David* calls *his own* thought, and what God, by ſearching found to be *in him. O Lord, thou haſt ſearched me, and known me, thou underſtandeſt* my *thoughts afar off.* It was firſt *his thought*, before it was *known to be his*: But now the thought that was neither *his*, by its *actual preſence*, nor yet *his* in any *fixed* and *certain cauſe*, was really no more *his* thought than *mine*, or than the *contrary thought*.

4. Not but that it is a truth (though not intended here) that from the thoughts that *are*, God underſtands the thoughts that *are not*, viz. ſuch *future thoughts* which depend as certain effects upon our preſent *thoughts*, as certain cauſes. The *future thoughts* that our *preſent thoughts* uncorrected and left to their own workings, *will* [not only *may*, but *will*] without his interpoſition, certainly produce in us, in ſuch and ſuch approaching circumſtances; ſuch thoughts the divine mind doth certainly underſtand, or know that they *will* be, though as yet, they be *afar off*. Thus our bleſſed Lord, in *Peter*'s *preſumption* ſaw *Peter*'s *fall*; he ſaw it *afar off*,

he ſaw it in its *hidden* and remoteſt cauſes; before *Peter* ſaw it himſelf; even when *Peter* thought himſelf ſo reſolved and ſtedfaſt, that he declares, *If I ſhould die with thee, I will not deny thee* IN ANY WISE, *Mark* xiv. 31. Thus in *Hazael*'s wicked heart God ſaw, what he would do *for* a kingdom, *murder his royal maſter*; what he would do *with* a kingdom, *harraſe and oppreſs God's* Iſrael: Though *Hazael* knew it not; nay, was ſo far from believing it of himſelf, that he cries, *Is thy ſervant a dog, that he ſhould do this great thing?* 2 Kings viii. 13. Thus, in the inveterate hardneſs of *Pharaoh*'s heart, God ſaw an obſtinate abuſe of all his milder methods. *I am ſure*, ſays God, *that the king of* Egypt *will not let them go, but by a ſtrong hand*, Exod. iii. 19. For ſo the context carries it, and your margin reads it.

But what then? Does it follow, that becauſe God ſees a *corrupt tree* will bring forth *corrupt fruit*, that therefore he muſt needs ſee from eternity, *that the very tree it ſelf, the work of his own hands*, not only *may* but *will be corrupt?* The predictions above mentioned, are never the leſs true, nor the honour of ſuch predictions leſs; ſhould we ſuppoſe that the reſpective wickedneſſes were then *certain* in their *cauſes*, by the *creature's own fault*, before they were *known* to be *certain*; and ſo on this account were the proper ſubjects of a ſure and certain prediction.

Q. 3dly. But are we not told, *That known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world?* Acts xv. 18. But now, if God's works, or any of them, depend upon man's *uncertain* will, then the *works themſelves*, and his *foreknowledge* of them muſt be *uncertain* too. I anſwer,

A.

A. (1.) That *ſin* is the *creature's work*, not *God's*. His *own works* are *good*: And as God may *purpoſe* what is *good* from the *beginning of the world*, before all worlds; ſo he may *know* it too. But as *ſin* (which is *evil*, only evil, even the ſuperfluity of naughtineſs) can never be the object of the divine *purpoſe*, ſo neither of his *eternal foreknowledge*, which I take to be nothing elſe, but a knowledge of what he has eternally purpoſed *ſhall* be. Or,

(2.) The works of God, like his purpoſes, are either *irreſpective*, or *reſpective*; *abſolute*, or *relative*. Thoſe works which have *no reſpect* unto the conduct of *moral* agents, *may be*, and *are* the objects of an *abſolute decree* and *foreknowledge*. The ſame may be ſaid, as to acts of ſovereignty, as whether any new and better diſpenſation ſhall be vouchſafed unto the *Gentile* world, or to any others, after they have ſinned away the virtue of the firſt. But ſuch as are acts of retribution, of remunerative or vindicative juſtice; as have an *intire* reſpect to the *free* determination of the *creature's will*, theſe are only the objects of a *conditional* and *reſpective* foreknowledge. He knows from the beginning of the world, how he will behave himſelf towards the penitent and impenitent; *He will render unto every one according to his works. That which a man ſows, ſhall he alſo reap. If he ſows unto the fleſh, he ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; if he ſows unto the ſpirit, he ſhall of the ſpirit reap life everlaſting.* God has ſettled in his eternal counſels the *relation* between the *creature's piety*, and *his own rewards*; the *creature's impiety*, and *his own puniſhments*. It is for the glory of the wiſe and righteous governor of the moral world, that his *purpoſes* and *knowledge* of the creature's

damnation, ſhould have a *reſpect unto*, and *depend upon* the creature's *ſin*, the *deſerving cauſe* of that damnation.

Q. 4thly. But what then becomes of the *ſovereignty* of God, if he muſt (as it were) aſk his creature's leave, whether it ſhall be *eternally miſerable* or *no? Shall the thing formed, ſay unto him that formed it, Why haſt thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay; of the* SAME LUMP *to make one veſſel unto honour, and another unto diſhonour?* Rom. xx. 21.

A. Will any one dare to ſay, That the creature is *firſt* made *ſinful* by the holy God; and *then* made *miſerable*, becauſe he is *ſinful?* That the God of *love* does of the *ſame lump*, *firſt* make a creature *unlovely*, and *then* make him *unhappy*, becauſe *unlovely?* Such a vile abuſe of the words of *Paul*, would tempt one to believe, that theſe were ſome of thoſe things, in his epiſtles, which St. *Peter* informs us, *are hard to be underſtood, which they that are unlearned and unſtable, wreſt, as they do alſo other ſcriptures, unto their own deſtruction*, 2 Pet. iii. 16.

If the *gold*, by its *own proper fault*, becomes *dim*, and the moſt fine *gold* be changed into *clay*; then for the potter, out of the *ſame debaſed* lump, to make one veſſel unto honour, and another unto diſhonour, is *ſovereignty* indeed, but no *injuſtice*. He is *gracious* unto the *one*, and *righteous* to the *other*. But to *make* us *clay*, and then to *hate* and *perſecute* us, becauſe we are not *gold*, is ſuch a ſovereignty as better ſuits the *prince* of the power of the air, than that glorious Being, whom *John*'s victors thus celebrate, *Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, juſt and true are thy ways, thou king of ſaints, Who ſhall not fear thee, O Lord, and*

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glorify thy name? For thou only *art* holy, Rev. xv. 3, 4.

Q. 5thly. Could we give up that *boundleſs idea* of the divine *ſovereignty*, yet his *independency* is a ſacred thing. Will any one affirm, that any part of the *purpoſe* or *knowledge* of God hangs upon the *creature's will*, whether it ſhall be accompliſh'd or verified or no? I anſwer in the words of the *third* of my *former letters.*

A. It may look very ſpecious to heap hyperbole upon hyperbole, one lofty expreſſion upon another, in honour of this Attribute. But when the very *decrees* of God, with that *fore-knowledge* which depends upon them, when theſe that are *free* in their own nature; that are conducted *by* and dependent *upon wiſe* and *holy counſel*; and that may conſequently be either *abſolute* or *conditional*; *eternal* or *not eternal*; either one or the other; juſt as it makes moſt for *infinite wiſdom* and *holineſs:* When (I ſay) theſe very *decrees*, not one excepted, ſhall be all put under the ſame neceſſity of being *ſtrictly abſolute* and *eternal*, with the divine *eſſence* it ſelf: When any ſhall cowardly give up the *counſel* and *purity* of ſuch *decrees* (and conſequent *fore-knowledge*) their *proper glory*, in complement to the idea of *abſolute independency:* And when in conſequence of this, they ſhall dare to inſinuate, that *free agents* (who are to be judged according to their *free* actions) are *doom'd* to eternal miſery, and *conſider'd* as ſo *doom'd*, not only before their exiſtence, or the exiſtence of any creature, but even without a reſpect to their *free determinations*; nay, that they are *not free*, but that their *ſin* and *damnation* are by an eternal infallible fore-knowledge, and abſolute decree, aſcertain'd and determin'd; When the caſe ſtands thus, theſe ſpeculations become

im-

important; and it behoves us to examine well the ground upon which ſuch notions ſtand, before we tenaciouſly adhere unto them. Leſt it ſhould appear at laſt, that the *liberty* with which God intended to endue thinking beings, ſhould be a liberty that is incompatible or inconſiſtent with ſuch *abſolute decrees*, ſuch an *infallible fore-knowledge*; and ſo *poſitive a providence*, as governs *natural things*, and this *material world*.

Q. 6thly. At this rate, you'll ſay, even the *good* actions of the rational creature, ſo far as they are really and truly *free*, are no proper *objects* of the abſolute and eternal *fore-knowledge* and *decree*, even of that God, *who is the father of lights, from whence comes every good and perfect gift.*

I anſwer,

A. 1ſt, If not only the creature's *power* of doing *good*, but every *determination* of that power unto *good*, muſt be *from God*, and muſt be *fixed* in his *abſolute* and *eternal fore-knowledge*, and by his *decrees:* Then it will follow, that it was *ever* and *utterly* impoſſible for *Adam*, or for the *angels* that fell, to have *continued good*; in that the *event* too plainly ſhews, that their *perſevering goodneſs* was not the object of ſuch a *fore-knowledge* or *decree:* It will alſo follow, that a creature may be truly *praiſe-worthy* for the *goodneſs* he could *not poſſibly help*, no more than he could *reverſe* a divine *decree*, or prove *infallibility* in an *error:* Or, it will follow, that a *perfect freedom*, or a real principle of *indifferency* to *either ſide* may be conſiſtent with an abſolute and eternal *fixation* or *determination* of that principle only to *one ſide*.

2*dly*, When God tells the houſe of *Iſrael*, his vineyard, *That he had fenced it, had gathered out the*

the ſtones thereof, had planted it with the choiceſt vine, had built a tower in the midſt of it, and made a wine-preſs therein, Iſa. v. 2. And when he complains, *That he looked it ſhould bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes:* This is very evident, that though they were under no *neceſſity* of being *fruitful*; yet under ſuch advantages of fruitfulneſs, they *might* have been *fruitful*; and had they been ſo, he had been juſtly entitl'd to the honour that is due to the chief and firſt cauſe, and had ſtill been that father of lights from whence this fruit came. Therefore he adds, *What could have been done* more *to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore when I looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?* Here are grapes that *might* have been brought forth, without an abſolute eternal *decree* or *fore-knowledge*, to have aſcertain'd them.

SECT. II.

Q. 7thly. IF it be reply'd, Is not the principle upon which I go precarious and falſe, *viz.* that *liberty* is *inconſiſtent* with *neceſſity?* " Whether I will be ſo ingenuous as to own it, " or no; yet to you it is very certain, that *ſome* " *neceſſity* may very well conſiſt with *liberty* in " the *freeſt* agents. God is *neceſſarily* good, and " yet *freely*: So are the ſaints and angels in hea- " ven; they cannot but be holy, and act holi- " ly, yet they are ſo, and do ſo *freely*. The " devils and damn'd in hell are neceſſarily wick- " ed, they cannot be other; and yet they are " ſo, and act wickedneſs freely: Wicked men

" on

" on earth, that are habitually and judicially " hardened in wickedneſs, they are *neceſſarily* " *evil*, and cannot but ſin; and yet they ſin " *freely*." This is Mr. *Clarkſon*'s objection in his diſcourſe of Free Grace. * I anſwer therefore,

A. 1*ſt*, There is an ambiguity in the word [*freely*.] If by acting *freely* no more in meant than that we are *conſcious* of what we do, and are actually *directed* and *determin'd*, in ſuch actions, by the *light* we *perceive*; without conſidering whether we be under a *neceſſity* to *attend* to, and to be *determin'd* by this *light*, or no; ſuch a *freedom*, I allow, is conſiſtent with *neceſſity*, *i. e.* conſider'd in this abſtracted ſenſe, it is a freedom that neither *includes*, nor *excludes* neceſſity: It is a freedom that *may*, eventually, be govern'd by the laws of *neceſſity*, or it *may not*.

But if by acting *freely* be meant, that it is the *act* of ſuch a *principle*, as is in its own nature *indifferent*, as has a *power* either *to attend* to, or *not to attend* to, and *ſo* to be *determin'd* by, or *not to be determin'd* by the *real objective evidence*: Then ſuch a *freedom* (which is more properly freedom, and is the freedom we are ſpeaking of) does at once deſtroy *neceſſity*, *i. e.* that which is *freely good* in this ſenſe is not *neceſſarily good*; is not ſo good, but it *might have been* bad; is not ſo holy, but it *might have been* unholy. And that which is *freely* bad in this ſenſe is not *neceſſarily bad*; is not ſo bad, but it might have been good; is not ſo unholy, but it might have been holy.

Now in this ſenſe I utterly deny that God is both *freely* and *neceſſarily* good, *i. e.* I deny that he is ſo *freely* good, as that it is (upon the whole,

* P. 119, 120.

or abſolutely conſider'd) in his *power* to be *bad*; that he is ſo *holy*, as that it is truly ſpeaking in his *power* to be *unholy*, by not attending *to*, and ſo by not being determin'd *by* infinite light and wiſdom. Indeed, in things that are purely indifferent (as in what moment of eternity the world ſhould be created; or out of a variety of means *equally* adapted to ſome valuable end, which of them he ſhould chuſe) in ſuch caſes there is a *liberty* of *indifferency* in the divine Being it ſelf; he is perfectly free to act either thus, or thus; and, indeed, without this principle, he could not in ſuch circumſtances act at all, there being an equi-poiſe of reaſon on both ſides. But then in ſuch inſtances there is an *abſolute freedom* from *all neceſſity*.

But where there really is any *moral turpitude*, or *moral excellency* in the object propos'd; *there* this moſt perfect Being is neceſſarily determined to *refuſe* the *one*, and to *chuſe* the *other*, by ſuch a *neceſſity* as excludes all *freedom of indifferency*, whatſoever. Though the divine will may be *free* to *either*, conſidered abſtractedly and by it ſelf; yet as under ſuch an infallible conduct of infinite wiſdom, that not only *does* but *muſt* wait upon it, it is *neceſſarily* determin'd to *one ſide*, and *upon the whole* is *not free*.

But whether this *neceſſity*, as to *moral acts*, be in every reſpect and degree exactly the ſame with the neceſſity of the divine *exiſtence* and *being*, and by which it ever inclines to be *happy*; a *neceſſity* that is in no wiſe the reſult of *counſel*, *will*, and *choice*, but is in the higheſt ſenſe *abſolute* and *independent*: Or, whether it be a *neceſſity* which the great God hath after a ſort *made* unto himſelf, by a *free*, *eternal*, and *infinite view* of what is *beſt*, and by an *immutable choice* of it; which,

indeed, is *now* as *fixed* and as *unchangeable* a law to the divine Being, as if it had entred into the *prime* and *immediate idea* of the divine *eſſence*, or ſubſtance: This, I ſay, is a point, which will be more clearly known, and more ſafely determined in heaven, where we ſhall *ſee not through a glaſs darkly, but face to face; and ſhall not, as now, know in part, but know even as alſo we are known*, 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

Only this muſt be confeſs'd, that if the *moral perfections* of God do differ in this from his *abſolute perfections of being*, that they are in God, not by an *abſolutely independent mode* of exiſting, but by a *conſequential neceſſity*, ſuch as an *eternal* and *infinitely wiſe uſe* of its *radical liberty* has *made to it ſelf*: It will follow, that in this reſpect alſo God created man in his own image, when *after God he was created in righteouſneſs and true holineſs*, Eph. iv. 24. And that the divine Being (as the godly are in a lower ſenſe) is with regard to its *holineſs*, *juſtice*, *goodneſs*, and *truth*, the *moſt proper* and worthy *object* of our eternal and boundleſs *praiſes*. And then we may, in imitation of the higheſt order of angels, celebrate, in a ſtill *nobler ſenſe*, the glory of the divine *purity* and *rectitude*, than we do *that* of God's eternal and neceſſary *exiſtence*, *ſpirituality*, *immenſity*, and *power*. *I ſaw the Lord ſitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it ſtood the ſeraphims.——— And one cried unto another, and ſaid*, holy, holy, holy, *is the Lord of hoſts, the whole earth is full of his glory*, Iſa. vi. 1, 2, 3. Repreſenting God as in a *peculiar manner* glorious in *holineſs*, and on this account the more *fearful in praiſes*. Thus, when *Moſes* ſaid, *I beſeech thee, ſhew me thy glory*, Exod. xv. 11. (meaning that which is more tranſcendently and eminently

eminently ſo.) The bleſſed God paſſes by the *abſolute perfections of his Being*, and inſtances in thoſe that are *moral*. *And God ſaid, I will make all my* goodneſs *paſs before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be* gracious *to whom I will be* gracious, *and will ſhew* mercy *on whom I will ſhew* mercy, Exod. xxxiii. 18, 19. Or, as you have it more at large, in *Exod.* xxxiv. 6, 7. *And the Lord paſſed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God,* merciful *and* gracious, *long-ſuffering, and abundant in* goodneſs *and truth, keeping mercy for thouſands, forgiving iniquity, and tranſgreſſions, and ſin, and that will by no means clear the* guilty. Thus ſetting forth himſelf as worthy of the *higheſt aſcriptions of praiſe* with regard more eſpecially to the glory of his *moral attributes*.

This account of the matter does not at all weaken the *real foundations* of our *dependance* on theſe his *perfections*, in as much as the *only proper evidences* of them, [*viz.* the matchleſs and amazing *excellency* and *rectitude* of all his *works* and *word*, join'd with the conſtant *experience* of *both worlds*, angels and men] remain as firm as ever. And we may be able to arrive at as full a conviction, that God is all that is *pure*, and *juſt*, and *good*, and will ever be ſo, without any variableneſs or ſhadow of turning, as we can of any thing we make the *reaſonable* object of our *faith*, and upon which our *happineſs relies*.

If I have ventured too near the face of the throne of God, in the defence of his glory, I earneſtly and humbly appeal to the throne of mercy. I can truly ſay, that it is for the praiſe of the glory of God's *grace*, that I have dared to indulge theſe thoughts; of the *riches* of his grace (I ſay) wherein he hath

abounded towards us, in all wiſdom and prudence.

And what hath been above obſerved of God, is, in its proportion, true of angels and ſaints, as under the guardianſhip of ſuch a Being in their *confirmed ſtate*: And may (*mutatis mutandis*) be the caſe of devils and ſome profligate men, when conſidered as ſuch who have ſinned themſelves into *moral darkneſs*, and have put for ever out of their reach that *moral light*, which *ſhould*, and (had it been duly improved) *would* have *ſanctified* them, and ſet them *free*. But then, when ever any *begin* to be *neceſſary agents* (pardon the expreſſion) they *ceaſe* to be *free agents*; and as long as they continue to be *free*, they *are not*, they *cannot* be under the laws of *neceſſity*. Therefore,

2*dly*. So far as any *foreknowledge* or *decree*, infers a *neceſſity* upon the creature, to be either *good* or *bad*; ſo far, and in ſuch a degree the creature's *liberty* of *indifferency*, or his *power* to be either *one* or the *other*, is loſt and gone. And ſo far as there is a *real liberty* of *indifferency* in the creature; ſo far, and in ſuch a degree, any *neceſſitating* foreknowledge and decree muſt be yielded up and reſigned: Unleſs the ſame principle may be known and decreed to be both *indifferent* and *not indifferent*, *determin'd* and *not determin'd*, in the ſame reſpect, and at the ſame time.

As to what you mention about the ſcheme of our redemption, I take it, as conſidered before all worlds, to have been only a *proviſional remedy*, in caſe of *Adam*'s fall; which an infinite mind, without any time or labour, though with exquiſite and abſolute wiſdom, formed for his recovery. If you make the ſcheme and decree

cree of redemption to be *abſolute*, as well as *eternal*, you make *Adam's fall* abſolutely and eternally *neceſſary*, to make way for *redemption*.

As to our Saviour's being a lamb ſlain from the *foundation* of the world; it may be underſtood of the *firſt promiſe*, *That the ſeed of the woman ſhall bruiſe the ſerpent's head*, which was made not in the *laſt* or *middle*, but *firſt* ages of the world, *viz.* before a foundation was laid for the world of men by *generation*, even immediately after our fall. However, it does not, I conceive, any more imply an *eternal* and *abſolute purpoſe*, that Chriſt ſhould be a *ſacrifice* for ſin, and conſequently that *ſin ſhould be*, that he might be ſuch a ſacrifice; than the devil's being a murderer *from the beginning*, imports that he was an *eternal murderer* HIMSELF, or ſo in the divine *preſcience* or *purpoſe*.

The prophecies are the only difficulty in our way; but then they are difficulties only, whilſt we have to do with thoſe that hold both foreknowledge and decrees. For what ever is brought to prove, that the *ſubjects* of ſuch prophecies were *not the objects* of an *eternal decree*, will equally ſerve to prove, that they were *not the objects* of God's *eternal foreknowledge*. As to that text in *Iſaiah*, if the words evince, that *contingent futurities*, (as you are pleaſed to call them) may be the object of the divine *preſcience*, ſo alſo of the divine *decree*. DECLARING *the end from the beginning, and from ancient times, the things that are not yet done, ſaying, My* COUNSEL *ſhall ſtand, and I will do all my pleaſure*, Chap. xlvi. 10. But you will not, I ſuppoſe, no more than my ſelf, allow, That all the *wickedneſſes* of men, are any part of that *counſel* here,

here, that *ſhall ſtand*, or that *pleaſure* which the *holy* God is *reſolved* to do. The prophet ſeems to ſpeak only of ſuch events as were fixed in their *cauſes*, and therefore were no longer left to the *freedom* of created agents, whether *they ſhould exiſt* or no.

SECT. III.

BUT you, I perceive, are ſtill of opinion, "That it may be made appear by *pre-*" *dictions*, relating to things acknowledged to "be *moſt contingent*, and the *exact fulfilling* of "them, that ſuch *contingencies* were *foreknown* "to God: Or, you find, you ſay, *predictions* "referable to the *acts* of *moral agents*, in one "part of ſcripture; and you ſee the *exact ac-*" *compliſhment* in other parts of ſacred writ; and "there is no diſputing againſt matter of fact, "whatever difficulties there may be in our "conceptions of the manner of it."

I allow the objection to be both *plauſible* and *popular*; and ſhall therefore examine it the more thoroughly. Then,

1ſt. The predictions you are here ſpeaking of, are what we call *abſolute predictions*. Now the ſubject of an *abſolute prediction*, I take to be ſomething that is certain, *abſolutely certain*, at the time of ſuch predictions: Yet ſuch predictions, you urge, are to be found in ſcripture about the *moſt contingent events*. Now a contingent event, and eſpecially that which is *moſt contingent*, muſt be an event that is, as yet, uncertain, *abſolutely uncertain*. Is not this then, in other words, to ſay, That what is *abſolutely certain*, is yet *abſolutely uncertain*? or, what is *abſolutely uncertain*,

is

is yet *abſolutely certain?* Is not this to aſſert, that it may be made appear by revelation, that a contradiction is true? But, I preſume, it can never be made ſo evident, that the moſt contingent events are abſolutely foretold; or that what is abſolutely foretold, is at the ſame time moſt contingent: As it can be, that a thing cannot be both *abſolutely uncertain*, and yet *abſolutely certain* at the ſame time. And if it cannot, the greateſt evidence, according to all reaſon, ought to determine us.

2*dly*. We ought to diſtinguiſh between a prophecy *abſolutely* EXPRESSED *only*, and one that's alſo *abſolute in its* DESIGN. Though there be *no condition* in the *words* of the prophecy; does it therefore follow, that the *accompliſhment* of ſuch prophecy depends upon *no condition?* Or, that the prophecy it ſelf, in its *original* and *primary* intention, is really *abſolute?* A diſtinction between them, muſt be allowed in prophecies relating to divine *judgments*; may not the caſe be the ſame, when the *wickedneſs* of a perſon or people is foretold alſo?

The prophecy of *Jonah*, is an inſtance of the *former*. *Yet forty days*, ſays *Jonah*, *and Nineveh ſhall be overthrown*, Chap. iii. 4. Here the *terms* are *abſolute*, no condition is expreſſed; and yet at the end of forty days *Nineveh* was not overthrown; which ſhews that the prophecy was not abſolute in its *deſign*, but had a *latent condition* implied. The real meaning was no more than this, That yet forty days, and *Nineveh*, *without repentance*, would be overthrown. Thus the *Ninevites* themſelves underſtood it, *ver.* 5, 9. *So the people of* Nineveh *believed God*, [*viz.* The *conditional* certainty of the prophetical threatning] and proclaimed a faſt, *&c. Who can tell,*

if

if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we periſh not? And thus the *event* explains it, *ver.* 10. *And God ſaw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God repented of the evil that he had ſaid, that he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

Now if a prophecy of *judgments*, which are *God's own work*, and what the ſinner is ſuppoſed *already* to deſerve, be not always *abſolutely certain*, though it be *abſolutely expreſſed*, but has ſometimes a *latent condition*; it will not be eaſy to prove, that prophecies of *ſin*, which is *wholly man's work*, and *not God's*, are *abſolutely certain*, though they be *abſolutely expreſſed*. They may be only a divine declaration of the real *tendency* and certain *event* of ſuch a wicked courſe *perſiſted in*, as an *admonition* to the *offenders*, and as a *caution* and a *warning* unto *others*.

Therefore, when God, by *Moſes*, *pre-moniſhes* the *Jews* of their future apoſtacy, and of that exceſs of wickedneſs that they themſelves, or their poſterity, would run into, *Deut.* xxxi. 16, 17, 19. It does not therefore follow, that ſuch *degeneracy* was a thing then *abſolutely fixed*, becauſe the *terms* were *abſolute*. It ſeems to be no more than a *prophetical threatning* or *warning* of the iſſue and reſult of the preſent courſe *continued in*. *And the Lord ſaid unto* Moſes, *Behold, thou ſhalt ſleep with thy fathers, and this people will riſe up, and go a whoring after the God's of the ſtrangers of the land, whither they go to be amongſt them, and will forſake me, and break my covenant, which I have made with them. Then my anger ſhall be kindled againſt them in that day, and I will forſake them,* &c. —— *Now therefore write ye this ſong for them; and teach it the children*

dren of Iſrael: *Put it into their mouths, that this ſong may be a* WITNESS *for me, againſt the children of* Iſrael. A witneſs, of what? that theſe future idolatries were *unavoidable* and *fixed*, from *all eternity*, and *known* by God to be ſo? No, no, This would rather have witneſſed *againſt God*, and *for the* Iſraelites; in that, neceſſity has no law. But the meaning is, that ſuch idolatrous compliances with the inhabitants of the land, would be the natural *tendency* and the certain effect of that unthankful, rebellious and unbelieving ſpirit (if perſiſted in) which was then worked in them; which God the rather mentions, to ſhew how clear he ſhould be of their *future apoſtacy* and *deſtruction*, in that they ſtood *forewarned* of both. God therefore directs them to their preſent corrupt diſpoſition, as the real *ground* of this *apoſtacy*, and his *predictions* concerning it. *Ver.* 21. *For I know*, ſays God, *their imagination which they go about, even* NOW, *before I have brought them into the land, which I ſware.* And if they indulged ſuch a perverſe temper, whilſt the *ſymbols* of his *more ſpecial preſence* were amongſt them, the *endearments* of his *miraculous deliverances* were before them, and they had ſuch a leader as *Moſes* to conduct them; what would they do, when ſuch obligations and reſtraints were removed or weakned? or what would not their *poſterity* do, that had the *example* of ſuch a wicked *contempt* of God and his ſervant *Moſes* to their face, to harden their hearts. And this account *Moſes* himſelf gives of the matter. *Ver.* 26, 27. *Take this book of the law, and put it in the ſide of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witneſs* againſt thee: *For I know thy rebellion and thy ſtiff neck; behold, while*

I am yet alive with you this day; *ye have been rebellious againſt the Lord, and* how much more after my death? *viz.* If ſuch a ſpirit as this be not timely rooted out from amongſt you. For ſo the divine expoſtulation, in the next chapter carries it. *Chap.* xxxii. 28, 29, 30. *They are a nation void of counſel, neither is there any underſtanding in them. O that they were wiſe, that they underſtood this, that they* would conſider *their latter end! How ſhould one chaſe a thouſand, and two put ten thouſand to flight,* &c. Therefore *Moſes* concludes with this ſerious and ſolemn advice; *Ver.* 45, 46, 47. *And* Moſes *made an end of ſpeaking all theſe words to all* Iſrael; *and he ſaid unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I teſtify amongſt you this day;— which ye ſhall command your children to obſerve to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a* vain *thing for you; becauſe it is* your life; *and through this thing ye* ſhall prolong your days *in the land, whether ye go over* Jordan *to poſſeſs it.* So that ſuch predictions ſeem to be no more than a prophetical warning, pointing out thoſe abominable practices, which their luſts, firſt or laſt, would entice and draw them to, if they ſhould *continue* to indulge and gratify them; and are not deſigned to repreſent as *fix'd,* but to *prevent* the ſins foretold, by diſpoſing the *Iſraelites* to a *more ready* obedience unto the *word* and *ſpirit.* *

3*dly.*

* It is an agreed caſe amongſt divines, "That a prophecy "(though abſolutely and particularly expreſt) is in it ſelf "no ſufficient argument of the certainty of an event. Such "was the prophecy of *Jonah* againſt *Nineveh*; and ſuch "was that of the captivity of the *Jewiſh* nation, and the "deſtruction of *Jeruſalem,* by *Nebuchadnezzar.* Though "the

3*dly*. Whether meerly becauſe the *event* propheſied of, doth *actually come to paſs*, it may be certainly inferred, that the *prophecy it ſelf* was *abſolute* and *peremptory*, and would not have been true, without ſuch a *ſubſequent event?* Does it prove any more than this? That the *latent condition* (*viz.* repentance, *&c.*) was not complied with? and therefore their indulged luſts brought forth the *predicted exceſſes*, and expoſed them to the *threatned puniſhments*.

The deluge or flood threatned againſt the old world, was followed with an awful accompliſhment. What then? Was the hundred and twenty years reſpite, deſigned to be of no advantage to them? doubtleſs it was. *My ſpirit ſhall not always ſtrive with man*, ſays God, *for that he alſo is fleſh: Yet his days ſhall be an hundred and twenty years*, Gen. vi. 3. i. e. Tho' my ſpirit ſhall not *always* ſtrive, yet it ſhall *ſtrive* an hundred and twenty years longer. And if the riches of my goodneſs, and forbearance, and long ſuffering, be not deſpiſed, but lead them to repentance, (as he *ought* and *may*;) well; I will turn away from my fierce anger againſt them: But if not; then, and not till then, it ſhall be a day of wrath, and of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God. And that this was the language of that *prophetical threatning*, is very evident from the words of *Peter*. *By*

" the *terms* were *abſolute*, yet a *tacit condition* (to wit, re-
" pentance) is known to have been implied. Theſe pro-
" phetical threatnings may be conſidered as one means,
" which the ſupreme governor (as a moſt wiſe phyſician)
" ſometimes uſes, either for the *prevention* or *cure* of thoſe
" diſeaſes, to which the whole political body, or any part
" of it, is expoſed."

Vid. *That anonymous author above.*

which [ſpirit] ſays this apoſtle, *He* [*i. e.* Chriſt] *went and preached unto the ſpirits* [now] *in priſon; which ſometime were diſobedient, when once the long ſuffering of God* waited *in the days of* Noah [*viz.* for their repentance] *while the ark was preparing: wherein few, that is, eight ſouls were ſaved by water*, 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20.

When the *Theſſalonians* are told, That they who receive not the *love* of the truth, that they might be ſaved, ſhould be given over unto ſtrong deluſions, to believe a lye: *That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleaſure in unrighteouſneſs*, 2 *Theſſ.* ii. 12. Such prophecies were not ſo much to ſignify that the *deluſions* and *damnation* were *events*, then abſolutely and irrevocably *fixed* and *certain*; as to excite an upright and fervent *love* of the *truth*, for the ends of their ſalvation, in order to *prevent them*.

"From whence we may infer it as a good "rule in interpreting prophecies of *future im-*"*pieties* and *judgments*, in all ordinary caſes, "that a *condition* is ever to be *underſtood*, tho' "*not expreſt*, unleſs when preceding impieties "may be preſumed to have arrived at ſuch a "daring height, as to have ſinned away the "virtue of the diſpenſations they are un-"der, and to have provoked the juſt governor "of the world to abandon the rebellious to "their *folly* and *puniſhment*." And then indeed, as their *puniſhment*, ſo their *folly*, by their *own fault*, is certain in it ſelf, in its *cauſes*; and from that time, is the proper ſubject of an *abſolute prophecy*, being the *object* of an *abſolute* and *fixed decree*, or *foreknowledge*. But till then, their final impenitency and utter overthrow, ſeem to remain uncertain and precarious. So

that

that with me it is an undoubted truth, that if the forbidden action was really *free* at the time of such *prophecy*, or what was truly in the power of the creature to have prevented, then the *prophecy* it self was only *conditional*, and *not absolute*; and so did depend upon some as yet undetermined condition (expreſſed or underſtood) as neceſſary to its accompliſhment. Or, if the *prophecy* be then *abſolute* and *irrevocable*, then the predicted *action* is, at that time, and in thoſe circumſtances, *not free*, but *neceſſary*, what it is impoſſible for the creature *now* to prevent: And therefore either is not of thoſe ſort of actions for which the creature is *really accountable*, as his own proper ſin; (though it be againſt the *letter* of a ſtanding law; as a madman may kill without murder;) or elſe, it is an action he is no farther *accountable* for, than as by his *own fault* he hath brought this *neceſſity* upon himſelf.

It can never be inferred from the bare prophecy it ſelf, that is declared *in time*, and *ſince the fall*, that there muſt therefore be in God, an *abſolute infallible decree* or *foreknowledge* of the creature's ſinful *free* actions, *before all time*, and *before the fall*. The *truth* and the *honour* of the prediction it ſelf are abundantly ſecured (as has been already obſerved) if the actions thus predicted, were *at the time*, and *in the ſenſe* of the prediction, *certainly true*, and *certainly known* to be ſo.

Therefore, " in the trial of a falſe prophet, " the *Jews* obſerved the *judgments* which he " threatned, and the *good* which he propheſied " to a place. If the *judgments* took not effect, " this did not argue him a falſe prophet; be- " cauſe God is merciful, as in the caſe of *Heze-* " *kiah*, and the people might repent, as the

" *Nine-*

" *Ninevites* did. But if he propheſied *good*, and " it came not to paſs, they judged him a falſe " prophet. The ground of this trial they made " the words of *Jeremiah*; *The prophet which pro-* " *pheſieth of* peace, *when the word of the prophet* " *ſhall come to paſs, then ſhall the prophet be known,* " *that the Lord hath truly ſent him*, Jer. " xxviii. 9." *

4*thly*, Does an event *abſolutely foretold* neceſſarily imply, that all the means by which it is *actually brought about*, were *by conſequence* as *abſolutely predicted*; and ſo, as *abſolutely neceſſary* as the very event it ſelf? Could not the determinate counſel and fore-knowledge of God, concerning the *delivery* of Chriſt to be an offering for ſin, have been *poſſibly* fulfilled, unleſs his own brethren, from a principle of *envy* and *malice*, had taken him, and with *wicked hands* had crucified and ſlain him? Did the eternal ſalvation of all that are redeemed unto God by the blood of the lamb, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; did their eternal ſalvation depend as much upon the *free, precarious, contingent* circumſtantial villainy of his *perſecutors*, conſider'd as a *means*, as it did upon *Chriſt's death* it ſelf, conſidered as the *meritorious ſacrifice?*

Is that received maxim [that he who *decrees* the *end* muſt *at the ſame time* decree all the particular *means* by which the *end* is eventually accompliſh'd] a maxim that will hold without exception? May it not be enough that he *has means* in his *power* to bring about that *end?* Does not this make the *end* as *certain* as if the very *means* were *preciſely determined?* Thus the

* *Vid.* Godwin's *Jewiſh Antiquities.*

ſinful *activity* of *free agents*, as well as the *efficacy* of *neceſſary cauſes*, might be made uſe of without infringing the *liberty* of the *accountable* creature, and without any ſo much as ſeeming diſſervice to the *purity* and *holineſs* of the divine Being, who (upon this ſuppoſition) doth nothing to *aſcertain* the *ſins* of his creatures, but only makes their *ſelf-created wrath* to praiſe him, *reſtraining the remainder*. As God is ſtill working in providence, ſo why may it not be poſſible for his infinite underſtanding to compaſs all his purpoſes with the ſame *wiſdom* and *holineſs*, as if he had from eternity foreſeen or decreed the *particular way* in which he would compaſs them?

5*thly*, Whether, whatever is *contrary* to the *letter of the law*, we can preſently conclude is not only *materially ſinful*, but is alſo *ſuch an action* as proceeds from a *free agent* acting *freely*, with a freedom of *indifferency*; and for which therefore the creature is *accountable* as his own act and *proper ſin*? Becauſe otherwiſe an action *materially* ſinful may be *abſolutely foretold*; and yet it cannot be from thence inferr'd that a *ſinful free action* is *abſolutely foretold*. The *original taint* in the humane nature will (without a divine interpoſition) *neceſſarily* produce ſuch and ſuch effects in the yet unborn poſterity of our firſt parents; and the God that knows all things that are *knowable* muſt foreſee theſe effects, and can (if he pleaſes) *abſolutely foretel* them: But then, though they may be *contrary* to the *law of innocency*, and ſo be *materially* ſinful; yet their future poſterity, in theſe inſtances, being *merely paſſive*, and never having it in their *power* to have *prevented* theſe iſſues from the corrupted fountain; I would aſk whether *theſe effects* are not rather the *diſeaſe* than the *crime* of ſuch perſons? And therefore, whether

ther they are not wholly out of the question, when we are disputing of God's *infallible foreknowledge* or *absolute prediction* of the *sinful free* actions of an unborn world.

6*thly*, Whether it will follow, that because any *action* that is *necessary* to an *event* ABSOLUTELY foretold, happens to be *contrary* to a *present* standing law, that therefore the *very sinfulness* of that action is as *absolutely necessary* as the *action it self*? Could not the divine Being (had he found it needful) have made that action, though *contrary* to a *present* standing law, to have been *innocent*, by *dispensing* in that instance with his *own law*? Nay, could he not have made it *commendable*, by commanding that as our sovereign, which without such a command would have continued a sin: As in the case of *Abraham*'s sacrificing of *Isaac*? Might not something like this have possibly been the case with respect to our heavenly Father's *offering* of his only begotten, had not the *ready*, the *forward*, and *officious* malice and covetousness of the *instruments* superseded any special interpositions of the divine Being?

7*thly*, Whether such like phrases as these [*Then was fulfilled*; *that it might be fulfilled*; *as it is written*, &c.] when apply'd to any *facts* in the *New Testament*, are never used in an *allusive sense* only, but do *always* and *necessarily* imply an *absolute* and *peremptory prediction* of that very *fact* or *event* it self in the *Old Testament*? I the rather mention this, not only because several passages in the *Old Testament* thus *adapted* to our *blessed Saviour*, and particularly to *Judas* in the *New Testament*, do not seem to be *literally* or *strictly* accomplish'd in them, as they are related in the *Old Testament*; but because you are not unapprized

prized what a dangerous handle the too rigid interpretation of such sort of phrases has given to the Deists, to shake the authority and truth of the sacred scriptures themselves.

"There is (says the author of *The true Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion*) "a great deal of difference between a *proof* "urged against an adversary, as those we have "mentioned in the *Acts*, and a *remark* made by "an Evangelist in the course of the history, "which it is not certain he design'd as a proof. "Nothing can be more natural than for the "Evangelists to observe, as they went along, "any remarkable agreement between occur-"rences which they mention, and antient facts "or prophecies mention'd in the *Old Testament*.

"There is nothing, says he, more com-"mon than for words, by length of time, to "lose their *primary* signification.

"There is an easy account to be given of this "matter, *viz.* how such an expression, as *that "it might be fulfilled*, &c. should lose its ancient "force; and how the Evangelists should use "such an expression only to denote a *similitude* "of an event to one anciently predicted. We "find expressions much like this in use even a-"mongst us now; when any thing happens ex-"actly answerable to what is spoken of in scrip-"ture, we commonly say, *that now is such a "scripture fulfilled.*" But I refer you to the author himself.

Therefore as to what you add concerning "the defection of the children of *Israel*, and "their infidelity in the times of the gospel, "with the treachery of *Judas*," which you say were plainly foretold: I shall only observe, that if you can prove they were *absolutely* fore-

told; I think I may undertake to prove, they were not at the time of ſuch prophecies *moſt contingent:* Or, if you can prove they were even then of the number of ſuch actions as were *moſt contingent*; I may undertake to ſhew they were only *conditionally* foretold, or *prophetical threatnings* only.

Prophetical threatnings are (as I underſtand them) what the ſupreme governor (as a wiſe phyſician) is pleas'd to make uſe of to *cure* or *prevent* thoſe diſeaſes, which his *moral ſubjects* are infected with, or expos'd to; or, in caſe of diſappointment, to convince them that there is a God, who beholdeth their miſchief and ſpite; and that judgeth in the world, by foretelling the more preciſe *time* or *manner*, in which he will correct and puniſh them. All do allow this ſenſe of them, where the evils that are threatned are merely *penal:* Therefore when the *Iſraelites* would have perverted ſuch prophetical threatnings unto deſpair and impenitency; *If our tranſgreſſions be upon us, and we pine away in our ſins, how ſhall we then live? i. e.* Our *overthrow* is now *fix'd*, and our *reformation vain.* God gives them the moſt ſolemn aſſurances, that the predicted judgments were not *ſo fix'd*, but that they might yet be *prevented* by their preſent and hearty repentance; *Say unto them, As I live, ſaith the Lord God, I have no pleaſure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O houſe of Iſrael,* Ezek. xxxiii. 10, 11. The *exact accompliſhment* of ſuch prediction, in their *future deſtruction* and *captivity*, ſhews, indeed, what the *reſpective* or *relative decrees* and *fore-knowledge* of God were, *viz.* that *impenitent Iſrael* ſhould be *captives*; but not that either

either their *final impenitency*, or their *captivity*, were at the time of the prediction *abſolutely certain*, or *foreknown* as ſuch.

The caſe I take to be the ſame, where the evils foretold are *moral*, and not merely *penal*. The deſign is to ſhew, what unthought of, and abhorr'd abominations ſuch a *ſpirit* or *courſe* would betray a perſon or people unto, if not timely reformed. Which *prophetical threatnings* (for ſo I chuſe to call them) are intended as a *warning* againſt ſuch a courſe, or as a *motive* to amend their ways; and not to intimate, that ſuch *wickedneſſes* were at that very time *abſolutely fix'd* and unalterable things. Thus God told the diſobedient *Jews*, that they who then *ſlew* and *deſpiſed* the *prophets*, would (if they *perſiſted* in ſuch vile practices) even *reject* and *crucify* their Saviour, the very Meſſiah they ſo joyfully and impatiently waited for; and that there would be found, of his own brethren, ſinners wicked and treacherous enough, for a thing of nought, to ſell and to betray him, mentioning thirty pieces of ſilver, a *certain ſum*, for an *uncertain*, or a ſum of little value. And the *conſequent accompliſhment* only evinces the hypothetical and *conditional* (not *abſolute*) certainty of ſuch prophecies. You your ſelf, I conceive, will not admit that Chriſt would not have appear'd the true Meſſiah, nay, might have been juſtly rejected as an impoſtor, if his own people had generally believed on him, and *Judas* had not treacherouſly betray'd him. Does not the apoſtle himſelf make a wide difference betwixt the *certainty* of Chriſt's being a *propitiatory ſacrifice*, and the *wickedneſs* of thoſe *inſtruments* by which it was eventually *brought about*? Acts ii. 23. *Him being delivered by the determinate counſel*

and fore-knowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and ſlain. His *delivery* to be a *ſacrifice*, not their *wickedneſs*, is what *Peter* makes the object of God's *determinate counſel* and *fore-knowledge*. And, indeed, if it was not ſo, God's *decree*, as well as *fore-knowledge* of ſin, even of the vileſt ſin, is eſtabliſh'd at once.

I do not here inſiſt (with Mr. *Jefferys* in his *True Grounds of the Chriſtian Religion*, chap. 15.) that many things in the *New Teſtament*, apply'd to facts and prophecies in the *Old*, are only adapted, and by way of alluſion. Though, perhaps, it will be no eaſy matter to prove that there was a literal fulfilling of thoſe paſſages in the *Pſalms*, which are apply'd to *Judas* by the apoſtle. Be pleas'd carefully to compare, *Acts* i. 20. with *Pſal.* xli. 9. *Pſal.* lxix. 25. *Pſal.* cix. 8. with their contexts.

SECT. IV.

BUT you'll ſay, that God talks to *Abraham* as if he certainly foreknew, "That "the iniquities of the *Amorites* would be full "four hundred years before they actually were "ſo, which was above three hundred years be- "fore thoſe who compleated the filling of the "meaſure did actually exiſt." To this I anſwer,

Firſt, If God did *certainly know*, before all worlds, (for this is the point in controverſy) that the *Amorites would ſin*, and that their ſins would be *full*, it muſt be *certain in it ſelf* before all worlds, not only that the *Amorites would ſin*, but

but that their ſins *would* be *full*. But now could it ever be in their power to make that *uncertain*, or not true, *after their exiſtence*, which *before their exiſtence*, or the exiſtence of any creature, was *certainly true?* The *Amorites* were nothing before all worlds, but what they were in the divine *idea* and *decree*. Now if God *decrees* to make ſuch creatures as not only *may* ſin, but *ſhall* ſin, ſhall *certainly ſin*, ſhall *certainly be full* of ſin; is it *equal*, is it *moſt equal* to *blame* them, nay to *deſtroy* them, for being what their God himſelf *reſolv'd* they ſhould be? Yet *are not my ways* equal, ſays God?

Secondly, If it be ſaid, that the *future fulneſs* of their iniquities could not then be *certain* in its *cauſes*, *i. e.* by any thing in the *creature*; and therefore its *certainty* muſt ariſe from the *firſt cauſe*. I anſwer,

Then, it could not be *certain at all* without making *God* the *cauſe* of their *ſins*, and of the *fulneſs* of them: For what is *future* is *nothing*, but what it *is* in its *cauſes*: So that for God to know that as *future* which exiſteth in *no cauſes*, would be to know *nothing* to be *ſomething*: Or for God *certainly to foreknow* what is *uncertain in its cauſes*, would be to know *uncertainty* to be *certainty*, which to me is as great an abſurdity as to know [U] to be [C] or four ſyllables to be three. The conſequence of which will be, that God's *decree* and *fore-knowledge* were only *conditional*. God intimates unto *Abraham* a deſign to deſtroy the *Amorites*; but yet it is only upon this ſuppoſition, that four hundred years longer patience, long-ſuffering, forbearance, and goodneſs, would not reform them.

But you'll ſay, what would have become of God's *promiſe* then unto *Abraham*, *viz. to give him*

him their land to inherit it, had the *Amorites repented?* Why, the *promiſe of Canaan* to his *poſterity* did not (for ought that appears) of neceſſity imply the *rooting out* any *part* of the *Canaanites*, any more than it did of neceſſity imply the *rooting out* the *whole*. Now that the *whole* Nation, that *all* the *Canaanites* were not deſtroy'd, we all know; and yet none doubts whether the *promiſe* was *accompliſhed* unto *Abraham*'s ſeed. It would, I apprehend, have been the very ſame, if the *repenting Amorites* had all continu'd in the land. Howſo? By becoming the willing ſubjects and tributaries of the ſeed of *Abraham*, as the *Gibeonites* and others were: A *dominion* over *Canaan* ſeems to be all that was *abſolutely* promis'd unto *Abraham*'s ſeed; they were therefore abſolutely forbid to make a *league* with the *Canaanites* as an *independant* people. But they were allow'd to offer *peace* unto ſuch as would be in *ſubjection* and under tribute to them; and it was their obſtinate *refuſal* of this, that warranted and provok'd the *Iſraelites* to put them to the ſword, and to deſtroy them*. Or;

Thirdly, Should it be granted that this intimation, about the *fulneſs* of the *Amorites ſins*, amounts unto an *abſolute prediction*, and ſuppoſes it to be a *fix'd thing* at that time: Yet it will, perhaps, be very difficult to prove that there was *no poſſible way* by which it might be *certainly foreknown* that they *would* fill up the meaſure of their iniquities *four hundred years* before that meaſure did exiſt, but by ſuppoſing that this *fulneſs* of their *iniquities* was made *eternally certain* by an immutable *decree*, or ſuppos'd ſo,

* *Vid.* Godwin's *Jewiſh Antiquities*, lib. 6. p. 257, 258.

in

in God's infallible *foreknowledge*. I ſee no inconvenience at all in believing, that as they were *ſinners* by their *own proper fault*, that as they had, *from generation to generation*, been *adding iniquity to iniquity*, by their own *free choice*, and had rendered the *traditional diſpenſation* of the goſpel *ſo much* and *ſo long* in vain; and in contempt thereof, given themſelves up unto *ſelf choſen* abominations, idolatries and darkneſs: So the divine Being at length *determin'd* to *withdraw* (or rather, *not to reſtore*) his *needful*, but *deſpiſed* help; and to leave them to be drawn away and enticed by their own *luſts*, and by *one another*, and by that *prince of darkneſs*, that rules in the children of *diſobedience*, leading *ſuch* captive at his will.

The conſequence of which, God *certainly foreknew* would be the *filling up* that meaſure of *ſin*, which would abundantly deſerve and juſtify in the eyes of the ſurrounding world, the deſolation he had *now* determined againſt them, and that he ſhould *then* bring upon them; reſolving at the ſame time, that what improvement their *future poſterity* ſhould make of their little remaining light and liberty [of their *one talent*] againſt ſuch a torrent of wickedneſs, though it ſhould proportionably *diſtinguiſh* them in the *other world*; yet it ſhould *not reverſe* the decreed judgment in *this world*. As the *good* figs, as well as the *bad*, among the *Iſraelites*, went into captivity indeed, but then it was for their *good*. God had a *diſtinguiſhing* reſpect unto them in that common calamity. So much for prophecies.

I have, Sir, at your deſire, read Dr. *Owen* againſt *Biddle*. In his previous obſervations, he lays down theſe following principles.

1ſt.

1ſt. "That God *certainly knows* every thing "that *is to be known*, i. e. every thing that is *ſci-* "*bile*. If there be in the nature of things, an "*impoſſibility* to be known, they *cannot be known* "by the *divine underſtanding*.

2dly. "That every thing that hath a *deter-* "*minate cauſe*, is *ſcibile*, may be *known*, though "*future*, by him that perfectly knows that "*cauſe* which doth ſo *determinate* the thing to "be known, *unto exiſtence*.

3dly. "That the *determinate cauſe* of things "that are *future* (*viz.* before all worlds) is the "*will of God* himſelf, concerning their *exiſtence* "and *being*." So far we are perfectly agreed. And I am willing to try the whole cauſe of God's *eternal preſcience* of the *ſinful free* actions of the creature, by theſe principles. As to what he adds, that whatever *is* at any time, was *future* (was *always future*, before its exiſtence; for this muſt be his meaning) is, I think, an *error*, and the *fundamental* error in this controverſy.

The *exiſtence* of a thing, is an argument that it was *poſſible before*, was *always poſſible*, but not that it was *future*, was *always future*. The *cauſe* of its *future exiſtence* muſt *exiſt*, before it can be ſaid to be *future*: And indeed, the doctor frankly owns it in the following words. "I aſk "(ſays he) whence it came to be *future*, that "*that action* was rather to *be*, than a thouſand "*others*, that were as *poſſible* as it?" He anſwers, "That which gives any action a *fu-* "*turition*, is that *determinate cauſe* wherein it "may be known, whereof we ſpeak."

Now this *determinate cauſe* muſt be either the *will of God*; or *the will of the creature*. If it be the *will of God*, then *his will* is the *cauſe*, *the* deter-

determinate cauſe of ſin, of the *exiſtence* of ſin: (Which I am ſorry to find is the doctor's opinion.) But if it be the *will of the creature*, then it cannot be *future*, before that *will* exiſteth: It cannot be *future* before the *cauſe* of its *futurition*; unleſs the *effect* can exiſt *before*, and ſo *without* its *cauſe*. But now the *free* actions of the creature, that yet are not, they, in reſpect of their *immediate* cauſes (as the *wills* of men) they (by the doctor's confeſſion) are *contingent*, and *may* be, or *may not* be. So that if the *will* of the *creature*, is the *real* and the *only cauſe* of *ſin*, then ſince the *cauſe* it ſelf is *contingent*, the *knowledge* that *wholly depends* upon this *contingent cauſe*, cannot be *certain*; no more than *perfect knowledge* can know *contingency* to be *certainty*; or *certainty* to be *contingency*; can know an *undeterminate* cauſe, to be a *determinate* cauſe. To conclude therefore, *ſin* being *only poſſible* from *eternity*, and *not future*, it is an *impoſſibility* in the *nature of the thing*, that it ſhould be *truly known* to be any thing elſe but *poſſible*, and therefore it could not (I conceive) be known to be otherwiſe, *i. e.* to be *more than poſſible*, to be *future*; No, not by the *divine underſtanding* it ſelf.

I am, Sir,

Yours moſt ſincerely,

S. F.

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